

THE GREAT TRADITION

KATHARINE FULLERTON
GEROULD

NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY



3 0109 00088 0453

PS
3513
E867
G7

DATE DUE

JUN 07 2004

Subject To Recall After 2 Weeks

**LIBRARY
NORTH DAKOTA
STATE UNIVERSITY
FARGO, NORTH DAKOTA**

THE GREAT TRADITION

AND OTHER STORIES

WITHDRAWN

BY

KATHARINE (FULLERTON) GEROULD

AUTHOR OF "VAIN OBLATIONS"

Great tradition
tion of short stories each hinging
uation in married life. The woman
urned to a worthless husband to give
er a chance, a husband who gave up
hope of a happy life because the
wife refused to be deserted, the wife
into her heart her stepchild, the
ther who could not forgive even to
ond generation, are types.

36597

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

1915

NOV 27 1944

N. D. S. U. LIBRARY
FARGO, N. D.

Copyright, 1915, by Charles Scribner's Sons

Published March, 1915

PS
3513
E867
G7



N. D. S. U. LIBRARY
FARGO, N. D.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
<i>The Great Tradition</i>	1
<i>Pearls</i>	43
<i>The Dominant Strain</i>	95
<i>The Bird in the Bush</i>	151
<i>The Miracle</i>	187
<i>Wesendonck</i>	227
<i>Leda and the Swan</i>	271
<i>The Weaker Vessel</i>	315

THE GREAT TRADITION

THE GREAT TRADITION

THE riot of sunlight at the long windows of Angela Boyce's room sank, farther back, into the pale yellow ground of the Chinese rug. Mrs. Boyce walked nervously hither and yon across great glowing spaces, like a light-intoxicated creature seeking gloom. Now and then she stopped before a chair or a sofa piled high with fripperies, and lifted off a garment, which she folded uncertainly, and flung into an open trunk. Meanwhile she talked monotonously to herself.

"Not that—I don't need it. I mustn't take anything I don't need. Too much luggage would never do. Perhaps Monica will wear the things I leave. No, she can't; she's a little *too* slim. Oh, go there!" She flung a tea-gown through a door into her dressing-room. "I must hurry, I must hurry," she went on under her breath. "Anything may happen. I must be ready hours too soon."

The house, facing its ostentatious gardens, was broodingly mute—not a sound in the corridors or

THE GREAT TRADITION

outside on the terraces; as if this nervous, beautiful woman had been able, for her own purposes, to strike it dumb. Mrs. Boyce's hasty gestures accomplished something, perturbed though they were: in half an hour she had achieved some order in the parti-colored havoc. The trunks were slowly filling, and most of the chairs were empty. For breathing space she went to the window, and looked out over the much-boasted "view."

"Perhaps some women could have borne it forever; I couldn't. I've borne it so long! And, oh, how glad I am it's over without my having to say good-bye to Owen!" The words were barely whispered. She leaned her forehead against the glass, and looked down into the landscape-gardened world. Then a frenzy of action seized her, and in ten minutes more the clothes were packed. Mrs. Boyce gazed about the big room that in its sudden tidiness seemed bare. "Jewels—all safe at the bank; letters—burned; money and ticket—here." She laid her hand on her bosom. "Never to temporize again! Oh, how good it is!"

She sat down in a big armchair and closed her

THE GREAT TRADITION

eyes. She had been living for years "on her nerve"; suddenly to give her nerves the sack, take away their occupation, was very like collapse. For years she had been nagged with daily decisions of a moral nature; now she had made one decision that would cover all others. Who would expect anything of Angela Boyce now? Ambrose Hale? Hardly; for he himself was the great decision. If daily life with Owen Boyce had meant at each turn a racking choice, then life with Ambrose Hale must necessarily mean no choices at all. Whatever the two men touched, they must needs touch not simply to different, but to opposite, results. New troubles there might be; she positively did not care, so long as the old ones ceased. Never again would she have to lift her eyes to a detested face and know that society somehow expected to see it and hers together. Monica? Well, Monica was nineteen, and Owen was fond enough of his daughter. He would not make her suffer. "It is reserved for me to do that," the mother thought bitterly. "But Monica will fall in love. Indeed, it's my duty not to stick on a day longer, so that the thing will have blown over before she wants to marry. Not that any

THE GREAT TRADITION

one minds my kind of adventure nowadays—minds for the children, I mean. People may even be sorry for me.” She smiled with shut eyes at the notion of any one’s pitying a woman who has shaken off an intolerable burden. The luck of really being able to get out before she died! She had so often thought she never should. “And, anyhow,” her whispered soliloquy went on, “Monica can’t marry at sixteen, as I did. She’s three years past that horrible possibility. I wasn’t sold—Owen couldn’t have afforded to buy me then—but I was cheated.” She opened her eyes and looked again round the familiar room. “We shan’t be able to afford this sort of thing,” she mused silently, “but it won’t matter. Think of it! It won’t matter. After all these years, when my own scrap of money has had to go to keep me out of hell, I can actually buy a little heaven with it.”

Angela Boyce, on the eve of departure, thought long, without misery, of the comfort of spaciousness. Room, mere room, had saved her so much. She had insisted long ago on a house out of town; insisted with a clear stress on every reason for it but the real one—that she should have room enough to live apart

THE GREAT TRADITION

from her husband. Any town house that the Boyces could have afforded, above all a flat—she could still shudder at the vision of a flat with Owen—would have pushed them into each other's arms. Lucky that they had bought their land before Owen's belated inheritance fell to him! Owen loved town. Fortunately he had taken a great deal of pleasure in being extravagant over the gardens; as much, perhaps, as she had in the wide, soundless corridors that separated his rooms from hers. Space, mere space, was the only luck she had ever had until now. If they had had to live together in close quarters, like two wretched peas in a tight pod, what would have happened? Perhaps even the sacrilege of more children. Angela Boyce covered her reddening face with her hands for one instant, then jumped up from the chair. "I didn't know, I didn't know. I was only sixteen. Ever since I grew up, I've seen him for what he is. Dear God, I didn't know!"

She shut the trunks and locked them, putting the keys into a bag. Then she passed into her dressing-room and swept all the remaining litter into the big closets.

THE GREAT TRADITION

“What will Margery think?” she laughed to herself. “I wish I could have had Margery with me, but I couldn’t take her away from Monica. And would she have come? I’m afraid Margery will be disappointed in me. She belongs where she used to be when I was a child—in my mother’s house, with all the Chippendale and the endless, torpid afternoons. I never can think of Margery in *my* house; but, then, I’ve never really had a house. Poor Margery! My nurse, and Monica’s, and perhaps—oh, Monica! Monica! I hope you’ll be happy, whoever he is.”

Then Mrs. Boyce stopped her fitful soliloquy, adjusted her hat, put on her coat, and drew on her gloves slowly, carefully, as if the process had some kind of ritual significance. So it had. If not the last time that she was to go wearily out of that brilliant chamber, it was very near it—the last time except the last. She ordered the car by telephone from the garage, and stood waiting. Still there was no sound in the house. It was swept and garnished and silent as if left, with awe, to a high destiny.

“Take me to a telegraph office when you get in town, and then on to Mrs. Paisley’s.” The chauff-

THE GREAT TRADITION

feur drove away with a fine flourish, and Mrs. Boyce leaned back easily against the cushions. She had never before permitted herself to take conscious comfort in her new limousine. She had still the habit of terror at any new gift of Owen's, as if her acceptance might reasonably lessen the gulf between them. Perhaps Owen Boyce gave her things merely as hush-money: how could she know what his unspeakable motives were? For years she had not once consented to plunge into the nether slime of Owen's mind; but she liked to think that if year by year he had been paying for silence, he had always got what he paid for. She had never opened her mouth to any one; she did not even know—and that *was* a feat—whether or not he was technically divorceable. She had closed her eyes and her ears to hint and to rumor; but there was a sulphurous stench about Owen Boyce's existence, and she had not always been able to keep her delicate nostrils unaware of it. Some women would have managed to divorce him, she knew; but Angela Boyce did not see herself paying people to spy on another human being, still less, paying them to lie. It might have been difficult

THE GREAT TRADITION

to get evidence; it certainly would have been odious. She preferred to step out magnificently, as she was doing. It soothed some inherited piety in her temperament that she, the wronged one, should be doing the monstrous, overt thing. It was somehow generous of her. There her soothed piety stopped. Pain had driven Angela Boyce away from religion—the religion that went with her mother's Chippendale—as it drives some people back to it. She was quite sure that God had not made Owen Boyce. Even the pull of the great tradition had at last grown lax. Were not she and Ambrose in a great tradition, too?

She laid her money down negligently, proudly, for the extravagant cablegram, and went back to the motor. It was very comfortable, all this; but a cottage and a donkey-cart in some shining fold of earth's surface would presently be luxury such as she had never known. Angela Boyce was in the thick of youth's romantic imaginings: marrying at sixteen, she had been snatched from dreams too young. At thirty-seven she went back to the old, half-finished things with fervor, like a child to the new toys that a long illness has kept it from.

THE GREAT TRADITION

In Mrs. Paisley's tiny flat she marvelled afresh at her own luck. Bertha Paisley had no patrimony to invest in freedom; no Ambrose Hale; above all (let us be candid) no beauty for a shining signal to rescuers. Bob Paisley drank, it was supposed; in any case, it was a sordid *ménage*. The flat smelled of cooking; the children were always heard and often seen; the chairs and tables were all varnished reproductions of furniture that should have been dealt with by a eugenics law. It always seemed a kindness to get Bertha away for an hour. Perhaps the most fitting thing Angela could do on this last day was to take her old schoolmate out for a decent luncheon. Bertha loved the motor; her plain face expressed a catlike comfort in the speed and ease of it. Beyond her little thwarted instinct for luxury, there was nothing catlike about Bertha Paisley. Angela felt at peace with her.

The talk over luncheon was desultory at first; but even Angela Boyce, schooled for long years to reticence, could not wholly omit the fateful note. It was the last time she should see Bertha; the last time, at all events, this side of paradise. She lifted her glass.

THE GREAT TRADITION

"Here's to your health, my dear!"

Mrs. Paisley's pale-blue eyes shone moonily.

"Yours, Angela. Or"—the lunar light went out of them—"Monica's."

"With all my heart; but why particularly Monica's?"

"Well, she's on the edge of life. I'm always sorry for a notably marriageable girl."

Angela Boyce frowned a little. Bertha was tactless. Didn't tact consist in not saying awkward things even when you *didn't* know?

"Monica has a hard little head of her own."

"I don't know where she got it," rejoined Mrs. Paisley. "Owen has always had a mad streak, and you have a natural instinct for martyrdom. How should Monica be hard-headed?"

"Owen's 'mad streak,' as you call it, has nothing to do with madness. It's the cleverest thing about him." Angela Boyce had never been so explicit, and Bertha Paisley's sallow face flushed. Mrs. Paisley blushed badly; under stress of emotion she grew blotchy, like some exotic cheese. Angela noted it and thought self-reproachfully, at the heart of her joy, of Ambrose Hale.

THE GREAT TRADITION

"You are a good woman, Angela. I've always wanted to tell you that, and to-day, for some reason, I can."

Mrs. Boyce laid her fingers for one instant on her friend's hand, a mere flutter of contact.

"No, I am not, Bertha. I never have been. But now I am going to be a good woman, forever." She meant what she said; she had come to the point where whatever separated her from Owen seemed holy.

"Now?"

"You'll see." She smiled, the least bit excited. The note of Angela Boyce's great decision had been preponderatingly a note of austerity; but just now she took a child's pleasure in being cryptic for Bertha Paisley. She did not stop to despise herself for it; it was a proof of so much that she could take a childish pleasure in anything. Yes, virtue was flowing back into her veins in a sane and steady flood.

"You are a good woman," Mrs. Paisley persisted. "I don't believe you've ever lied, and yet you've never, in all the years, said a thing you oughtn't."

"Do you mean that the things one ought to say are usually lies?"

THE GREAT TRADITION

"You know what I mean, Angela." Mrs. Paisley's pale eyes tried for a subtle expression. ("Heavens!" thought Angela, "what abominable luck to have your spirit so at the mercy of inadequate features as that!") "Let me be honest. I don't suppose life's perfect for you—it isn't for any one—but you've always behaved as if it were. I don't know any one who has kept it up so."

"You think I've had a lot of keeping up to do?" The relief it would be to tell Bertha! But no, she mustn't.

"No, no. Only—don't all human beings have things to fret them? And you've never shown you were fretted."

"I have been fretted." Mrs. Boyce permitted herself the light admission. She felt as if already she had joined Ambrose Hale. A mere week of ocean lay between them; morally she was at his side, her arm in his, the eyes of both turned to the sun. But she mustn't tickle the nodding Fates with rash prophecies. Even to Bertha she wouldn't say more than the light words any one might say. She shut her lips firmly; they were all too ready to confess.

THE GREAT TRADITION

"You can't keep it up forever; none of us can. But do, my dear, keep it up a little longer for Monica."

Mrs. Boyce leaned her elbows on the table, and faced her friend.

"You have Monica very much on your mind. Is there any reason why you should?"

Bertha Paisley crumbed her brown bread awkwardly.

"Yes, I think there is."

"What?" She could not keep her voice from being sharp. What right had Bertha Paisley, who was the last word in human insignificance, to speak in a voice of foreboding, a cracked echo of the Sibyl?

"Monica isn't so hard-headed as you think she is. She talks quite wildly sometimes. Probably you don't know. She attracts men, and they attract her. She's bound to have love-affairs, if she isn't having them already. I imagine she is, you know."

"Bertha Paisley"—Mrs. Boyce gripped the table—"do you mean that you think Monica amuses herself with young men that I don't *know* about? Monica tells me everything."

THE GREAT TRADITION

Mrs. Paisley pursued a last shred of endive about her plate, captured and ate it. Then she wiped her mouth on her napkin.

"No girl ever told her mother everything, Angela, as you perfectly know. I'm not slandering dear Monica. I only say she's brilliant and lovely, and with her chance in life, why shouldn't the men flock? And they do."

Mrs. Boyce ordered dessert and coffee. She was very explicit with the waiter, consciously sparring for time.

"If she's brilliant, she can take care of herself all the better. I'm not going to interfere. I've seen enough of girls' being influenced; but I don't think, you know, that Monica has any heart yet. I pity the man who gives his heart to her just now. Only I should like to know where you get your information about my daughter. I thought I knew her at least as well as any one else."

"Oh, I don't know Monica much. I bore her to death. My cousin's girls see her, and they tell me. She is flirting with young Telford."

Angela Boyce laughed.

THE GREAT TRADITION

"Young Telford won't hurt her. He's a babe in arms."

Mrs. Paisley looked up at her friend tentatively, shyly. She visibly boggled over what she had to say.

"His big brother Stephen isn't a babe in arms."

"Stephen Telford? Are you mad, my dear? He's married."

"Exactly." Mrs. Paisley brought out her retort in a dull little tone of resignation. It was extraordinary, Angela Boyce reflected, that Bertha, who hadn't even enough malice for self-respect, could say such things. But the world was unanimous in crediting Bertha with a kindness positively unminged. Bertha's stupidity must, however, be dealt with. She was glad she had this last chance to set her right.

"My dear woman, do you see my daughter—mine, I say—involving herself with a married man?"

"Not yours, perhaps—but Owen's, yes."

"Owen's?" She tried to make her question haughty, but she failed. She had always held her tongue about Owen; but she could not actually use speech to defend him. To have been married to him

THE GREAT TRADITION

was a smirch on her virtue, a mud-spot on her beauty. To think of Monica as Owen's child was impossible to her; for years she had not done it.

"Owen has a streak of madness, as I said. It's very delightful of you to deny it, but it's true. Think of the way he swept you off at sixteen—all very romantic, but perfectly mad. Your dresses were barely long."

"Romantic!" It wasn't her notion of romance, that wooing; but, then, Bertha had been married to Bob Paisley. Any man who was not Bob Paisley doubtless seemed to Bertha romantic, as anything that was not Owen Boyce was purity for Angela. "Romantic!" she repeated, with an inward shudder. "Well, then, Monica isn't romantic."

"Oh, but you know what girls are nowadays."

"Do you? That's the point, I think. After all, you married late, Bertha; and you've been mewed up in your nursery while the rest of us were teaching our daughters to do up their hair. I'm willing to admit that the world's a sink and a sewer, but I still don't see my daughter flirting with married men. Aren't you a little morbid, dear?"

THE GREAT TRADITION

Mrs. Paisley threw off her gloom and laughed healthily.

"No, I don't think I am. I'm only very glad, exceedingly so, that Monica has the right kind of mother."

Mrs. Boyce waved the compliment aside. It was not one that it would be sweet, in the circumstances, to dwell on.

"Where, pray, does she see Stephen Telford? No one could get on with his wife; Monica would never dream of going there. And really, Bertha, I do know the houses my daughter frequents." She poured out the coffee with a superior air.

Mrs. Paisley took her coffee-cup.

"She sees him everywhere—at the Ormes', for example."

"Bertha Paisley, do you do a society column?" If she had been less annoyed, she would never have permitted herself that impertinence. Bertha had married badly, and obscurity had descended on her with a rush. She was pre-eminently a person not to be taunted.

"No, I don't." Mrs. Paisley flushed again. "I

THE GREAT TRADITION

don't even read one. But I do hear things now and then from people. Not every one has dropped me, you know."

"No one who is worth seeing has dropped you, Bertha dear; but of course you're dreadfully busy. I'm sure I never went anywhere when Monica was little."

Mrs. Paisley smiled at the atoning speech. The beauty of Bertha was that niceness always did atone to her for nastiness.

"Oh, you always had more leisure than I," she said honestly. "You always had nurses and old Margery."

"Oh, nurses, yes; but you know how a mother suspects everything in the cosmos of conspiring to hurt her baby. I never left her."

"I'm sure you didn't, and I hope you won't leave her now."

Mrs. Boyce tried not to stare. It was positively as if Bertha knew.

"Do people also tell you that I neglect Monica?"

"Oh, no, my dear; no, no. I think you're quite right to give her as much freedom as you do. It's so clear

THE GREAT TRADITION

that you do it for her own sake; for you haven't an atom of mean frivolity in you, Angela. Only"—Mrs. Paisley set down her coffee-cup and appeared to choose her words—"you are so young and lovely that it seems as if you had an extraordinary chance to go about *with* Monica; to be her comrade, her pal, you know. You could sit up with her in your dressing-gown after a party, and make fun of Stephen Telford, just like another girl. It isn't as if you had men of your own on your hands, like some of these disgusting women nowadays."

Angela Boyce saw that her ironic sense was the only thing about her that would derive comfort from Bertha Paisley; except, perhaps, that there was comfort in perceiving reminiscently that she and Ambrose Hale had been visibly as "innocent" as they were technically.

"How do you know that I don't?"

"I'll tell you how I know: because Monica's absolutely honest, and if you were as intimate as all that, you'd have noticed just what other people have. Monica's less two-faced than any one."

"Oh, we've talked. I've heard her nonsense."

THE GREAT TRADITION

It was hard to sound brave when one had to be so vague.

"That's all right, then. Of course, I've never believed that Monica would do anything foolish while you were there to show her what a beautiful creature a woman with the old ideas can be."

"Well, then, what makes you talk as if I were not there?"

"I don't know," confessed Bertha. "You seem so—withdrawn. You'll laugh at me, but lately I've felt almost as if you were going into a convent."

Angela Boyce smiled. Once again she laid her fingers for a fluttering instant on her friend's hand.

"That's very deep of you, Bertha. The idea actually crossed my mind about a year ago, but I'm not religious enough. I never, never shall." She had the sharp sensation of foolish, mounting tears. Bertha touched so many things she could not see, like a blind woman in a room packed with fragile treasures. It was a relief to drink the last drop of her coffee and know that she didn't have to order anything else. To hear the tinkling reverberation of her

THE GREAT TRADITION

secrets as Bertha, unseeing and unhearing, stumbled eagerly about among them—no, decidedly, it was too hard on a woman whose delicate lips didn't take easily to lying.

"Shall I take you home? I have to get back, or we'd go for a drive."

"Take me out to the Park and drop me. I'll walk back."

Angela resigned herself to the extra blocks. They gave Mrs. Paisley a chance for one more stumble.

"You've always seemed rather exceptionally religious. You have the air, the manner, the peculiar grace. I know I sound old-fashioned, but the Creed is somehow the only thing you don't have to bargain with. It's the only thing in life that you can deal with in the grand manner." Bertha Paisley spoke with sudden passion, her averted face turned to the parti-colored current of the avenue.

"Oh, I have my creed." Angela Boyce kept her lips firmly closed then until Bertha descended at the gateway of the Park. If she had spoken another word, she must have cried out to her friend that her creed was Ambrose Hale. For Monica's sake, she must

THE GREAT TRADITION

as fish, she knew that fish, in their own strange way, communicated to one another the news of their aqueous world. She did not want a stare or a mutter for Monica to deal with when she returned. She would have fled to Ambrose Hale, she thought now, amid storm and shouting, amid violence and oaths, if that had been necessary; but she preferred to shed her old life decorously, inconspicuously, as a lady should do everything. She was glad she was not called upon to shout or scream. You had to be to the gutter born to do that well.

Angela Boyce put on a tea-gown—one of those she had flung into the dressing-room closet—and dined alone, meditative and calm. The childish excitement that she had felt for a little with Bertha Paisley was quite gone. Bertha had not succeeded in worrying her; the worst that her hints about Monica could have done would have been to accentuate the gravity of what Monica's mother was about to do. But even Mrs. Paisley had not been able to make the thing any graver than Mrs. Boyce had for a long time known it to be. Angela Boyce was not a woman to minimize a departure from morality. No one, not

THE GREAT TRADITION

even Ambrose Hale, would ever know what a battle she had fought: a silent battle without a war-cry, the antagonists creeping grimly, with frozen limbs and faces, over a glistening ice-plain. On that field the scarlet banners of passion were invisible for snow, and victory had been very like standing at the Pole, knowing at last that, whichever way one looked, it was due south. Time later for the color and sound and warmth of love. Did Bertha Paisley think she could put Angela Boyce through anything she had not been through already? She had exhausted, in connection with her decision, every cerebral experience possible. An extra phrase or two in her letter to Monica, and then, forever, whatever mood Ambrose Hale elected to impose. Owen? Oh, Owen had been left behind early on that frozen march. She had not wondered even once how Owen would take it. Her difficulties had been entirely with her own conscience, and her conscience dealt with Owen only as a symbol, something marked "H" for husband, standing for archaic things with which the individual had nothing to do.

Mrs. Boyce had no great gift with her pen, and

THE GREAT TRADITION

even for a fluent person the letter would have been difficult to write. Page after page she tore, laying the pieces in a little heap to burn. But eventually, late in the evening, she got it all written down as well as she could hope to, and she sealed and addressed the letter with a long sigh of relaxation. She did not have the white night she expected. Some inward exhaustion claimed its right, and worked on her like a wise narcotic. No ghosts haunted her pillow, and she slept for the last time in that familiar room as if her bed were a hospital cot in a ward.

She rang early for her breakfast, and old Margery brought it. Sometimes Margery chose to do that, and no maid ventured to interfere; but Angela wished she had not chosen to do it this morning. Margery had to be talked to, petted a little, for the sake of her history. The sun was up, and Angela Boyce's feet were restless to be gone on their appointed way. She had left orders for her luggage to be called for in town. She must be there to see it off; she herself must reach the *Cambodia* early. She had no time for Margery, and no heart to spare for a plausible farewell. Why had not Margery spent the night with her

THE GREAT TRADITION

people? Mrs. Boyce was a little short with her as she drank her coffee.

The old woman sat down heavily in a chintz-covered armchair and looked sombrely about the room. Her rheumatism was very bad. Angela resigned herself to symptoms.

"I have to go to town early this morning." Perhaps Margery would take that hint. She was a superannuated and privileged person, and if there was anything to do, she made room grudgingly for a younger servant. Now she said nothing.

"You had better let Anna take these things away. I have to get up directly."

The old woman turned her eyes slowly to Mrs. Boyce.

"So ye're flitting, Miss Angela?"

"I'm flitting to East Twentieth Street."

"And ye're flitting no farther?"

Mrs. Boyce frowned.

"I'm going to various places in town. I have a lot of things to do. When you go out, please tell Anna to order the car at nine. I shan't take long to dress."

Again the old woman looked around.

THE GREAT TRADITION

"Ye've not left much, Miss Angela."

Mrs. Boyce frowned again.

"I sent a lot of things in yesterday, if that's what you mean. I'm going to give some of them away." ("Well, I will," she promised herself mentally.) "How you all must chatter down-stairs!"

Margery folded her hands on her lap and shook her gray head sadly.

"It's no use, Miss Angela. I know. When they telephoned ye from the steamer office, and ye burned letters by the handful in your fireplace, and I saw all the photographs of the bairn gone off the chimney-shelf, I had my thoughts. And now they tell me three trunks went yesterday while I was by Alice's bedside. Your poor mother, to have her home used for a way-house to destruction! Ye're flitting, Miss Angela. I know it well. And the word of God left behind!" She pointed at a Bible on the table beside the bed. The tears welled from her faded eyes, and her stiff fingers drew a handkerchief from her pocket.

"Margery, I can't discuss this with you. You are too absurd."

THE GREAT TRADITION

“Discuss and discuss!” There was not a shadow of impertinence in the old woman’s wail. “Ye wouldn’t discuss when ye were a bairn and wanted chocolate icing; nor yet when ye married Mr. Owen; nor yet when Miss Monica should have been short-coated. Many more nights I’ve laid awake for your pain than my own, and ye think me dour. It’s not for me to tell ye your duty. Ye’re a grown woman and all; but what will I say to Miss Monica?”

Angela Boyce sat up high against her pillows.

“You need say nothing whatever to Miss Monica. You can give her that letter on the desk when she comes back this afternoon. You’ve got I don’t know what ideas in your head, my poor Margery, and I haven’t time this morning to talk to you. But you can be perfectly sure that, wherever I am, I shall have the word of God with me. Now do go, and send Anna.”

“Have ye time to read this?” The old woman drew a letter from her capacious pocket. “One of those bit boys in a uniform brought it half an hour syne.”

For the first time during her crisis Angela Boyce

THE GREAT TRADITION

was troubled. She recognized her daughter's firm, modern handwriting. Probably Monica only wanted more clothes sent in to the Ormes'; yet even the least significant word from Monica at just that moment was too much. Any one of a hundred unsuspecting phrases would be more than she could bear.

"No, I haven't time," she said. "I'll read it on the way. If it's anything important, I'll see Miss Monica in town. Now, Margery, I really must get up. You've wasted a lot of my time. And I want the car at nine."

Old Margery rose slowly and painfully from her chair.

"I'll not say but in the trouble of my heart I spoke to the bairn."

Mrs. Boyce gazed at her.

"What in the world did you say to my daughter?"

"There was naught I could say but that I was sore troubled for ye. But I didna think it would come so soon." The old servant made her way to the door, the tears rolling slowly down her brown cheeks.

Angela Boyce's heart was hardened within her by fear of the letter that she held unopened in her hand.

THE GREAT TRADITION

Without speaking, she let Margery shuffle through the door and call querulously to Anna. It verily seemed to her that she could never forgive the aged nurse for her old habit of solicitude, her wretched mock-maternal assumption of rights. Misgivings, terrors, protests from Monica, she could not bear; not, at all events, until she was ready for the journey. She had had increasingly, the last days, a superstitious feeling that her old life would drop from her as soon as her foot touched the *Cambodia's* deck; once off the land, she would be Ambrose Hale's inalienable property. Until then, Monica, yes, even a breath of Owen Boyce himself, would be in the air. She would not thicken that atmosphere with the sense of whatever it was that her daughter had written. Her own letter covered everything that Monica could say. A wireless—yes, she might send a corroborating wireless, with a reckless amount of love in it. And after the divorce, when she and Ambrose were married, she would make it all up to Monica with a garlanded and gilded tenderness. But she would not read the letter now; she would do nothing that confessed for a moment a responsibility to any

THE GREAT TRADITION

creature save the man she loved. After all, it was more than thinkable that Monica's note said nothing. They were both used to old Margery's Covenanter temperament. If Monica had been really worried about anything, she would have come herself, not trusting any "bit boy." In any case, Mrs. Boyce had been helped through the long months of struggle by the secret conviction that her daughter would not wholly disapprove. She had caught Monica so many times looking at her a little pityingly, as if she had no future. Angela Boyce put the letter in her bag, snapped the lock firmly, and without one more glance at her repudiated home, stepped into the car. She would not look back for fear of seeing Margery on the threshold. In point of fact, if she had looked back, she would have seen her, and no one else. Margery had opened her harsh lips only to her "bairns."

Yet Angela Boyce had not done with scruples so easily as she thought. If Monica wanted more clothes—she put it to herself weakly—she would do better to telephone home from town. But she had, as she perfectly knew, no such practical reason for

THE GREAT TRADITION

breaking her resolve. Simply, her conscience was of the Lot's-wife type, always backward-gazing through a blur. Towards the very end of the drive, threading the city streets jerkily, now held up at corners, now softly rushing forward—the old familiar rhythm that she had so often thought would never end in any cadence of joy—she took out Monica's letter and broke the seal. It was not long; she had read it through twice before the man stopped the car in front of her mother's house.

“You can go home. I'll telephone later what time I want you, and where.”

It was what she had intended to say to him in any case, and she said it mechanically, grateful that she need not find another speech to make, yet with a kind of numb astonishment that in so different a situation the old formula should serve. It seemed such a foolish little economy, when the time and intelligence of months was now at one stroke wasted.

She called for some of the queer old sherry that she knew still lingered in the wine-cellar, and, sitting stiffly in one of the Chippendale armchairs—they

THE GREAT TRADITION

had always been uncomfortable, but never so torture-some as now—braced herself for reflection. She had half an hour before the cab would arrive for the trunks, and she took it all. Dazed though she was at first, she did not have to struggle through a welter of alternatives. Her whole half-hour accomplished simply the slow irradiation of a mental scene in which, meanwhile, nothing shifted or changed. She stood at last in the rawest possible light, face to face with the incontrovertible fact that, from the moment she had glanced at the letter, she had suspected. Monica, with a unique, incomparable gesture, had flung her back into hell. Nothing else that Monica could have done would have achieved it. She had selected the one weapon to destroy Ambrose Hale; and the bitterness of it was that the child had not once thought of Ambrose Hale when she did it. She had probably meant to ease her mother off. She certainly had not meant to block her; for did not she actually say that she and Stephen Telford would have sailed on the *Cambodia* if she had not discovered from a prattling clerk that her mother was sailing on it herself? Had not she even tried to let

THE GREAT TRADITION

her mother out in every way, though it was only too clear that Margery's lugubrious fears had pushed her to her fate?

"You'll think me a selfish beast; but, honestly, I couldn't have gone off knowing you so unhappy—for I've made out a good deal the last year—if old Margery hadn't babbled, and my discovery at the steamship office hadn't clinched it. If I didn't believe you were going to be happy, too, I'd have stuck by, mother darling, till you were. But to know that you've decided to cut loose makes it possible for me. And it's such a blessing to believe you'll understand. I think you must have found a new life for yourself, or you'd have told me something about it."

There was more than this in Monica's firm scrawl; but those were the words Angela Boyce felt she should never, for one waking or sleeping moment, forget. She had meant not to let Monica know until her own act was irrevocable, and her frustrated intention Monica had ironically carried out. Monica had already sailed; and even if Angela Boyce had

THE GREAT TRADITION

torn open the letter at once, she could have done nothing. What a picture—mother and daughter rushing across the Atlantic in disastrous parallels to the same eclipse! And then she shrank from her own conclusion. As if her shining rescuer could belong to the same race of beings as Stephen Telford! They were as little like as Perseus and a satyr.

“The beast! The cad!” she found herself impotently murmuring.

And Monica, her Monica! Girls had changed, as clucking, croaking Bertha Paisley had hinted. It was the immemorial cry: “I don’t see how Stephen and I could have borne it much longer.” That, too, had stared at her from the fateful page. She, Angela, had not seen, either. Only did Monica think the cases were alike? Did she madly believe that passion had its rights over you in your teens? And Angela Boyce, with a wail, “It’s different! it’s *different!*” rose from her chair. Old Ellen came in to find her standing there, fixing the wall with her tragic, tearless gaze.

Dimly aware of Ellen, she spoke.

“The men for the trunks? The trunks are to stay

THE GREAT TRADITION

here. Pay the men something. There's my purse. Don't come back. I'll ring when I want you."

When the door was shut, she sat down again weakly. Her voice had been normal enough, but she must pull herself together before she went further; must know so well what she was to do that she could do it automatically, without thinking.

Even now, when she had accepted the fact that she herself was not to taste freedom, her dominant emotion was not of despair—there was the rest of life left for that—but of shock. She had known that people would be horrified by her own act, that they would class her with all the vulgar women who ran away from their husbands for vulgar reasons. But she had fortified herself—perhaps some of those women did, too—with the belief that hers was the most special of cases. At all events, if she had been in a low tradition, she had been also, from another point of view, in a great one. She had always firmly kept that fact before her. Whereas Monica—ah, poor Monica was in no tradition at all: she was sunk beneath the veering tides of custom in the nethermost ooze. "Like mother, like daughter"—she

THE GREAT TRADITION

could see herself and her child figuring, a pair of female fools, in some travestied *Comedy of Errors*. Well, they should not say that, either. If people had learned of her elopement with Ambrose Hale, they might have shaken their heads and called it romance; but when they learned of Monica's emulation of her mother, they would have gabbled of "hereditary taint." She knew her world well enough for that. If Monica's case was to be special, her mother's would have to be irreproachable. That was what she had realized when she had first read the letter. It had taken her an hour to formulate it; but she had known, she had known like a shot, after the first sentence. Alone, perhaps poor Monica could be tragic; together, they would have been a cheap and nasty farce. She had always hoped not to make Ambrose pay too much. The one thing she could do for him now—the last thing she would ever have a chance to do for him—was to save him from ever being bracketed with that beast of a Stephen Telford. She did not at the moment waste her anguish in feeling responsible for Monica's act. She was not responsible. Only twenty years of Owen Boyce could

THE GREAT TRADITION

have made her kick over the traces; and Monica had not had even twenty years of existence. She would not lay on Ambrose the burden of a creature who could be laughed at, that was all.

All? No, it was not, quite. Monica should have a mother who would stand by her to the last, and an impeccable mother whose standing by would be of some use. Bertha Paisley had told her that she, Angela, had an instinct for martyrdom. As she looked round her mother's drawing-room, she wondered what such a home could breed and shelter but martyrs. She felt more in her niche here than ever before, since, for whatever romantic and heterodox reason, she had at last done voluntarily something that was in the spirit of the place. People like her mother and Margery didn't blame one for original sin: they blamed one only for succumbing; and (there was a kind of glory in having it hurt to be good. That, she supposed, if one must analyze, was in a great tradition, too.) Angela Boyce could almost see herself living in that house, with never a pillow to her back. Only, to make it complete, she and Owen ought to move into her mother's vast black-walnut

THE GREAT TRADITION

room up-stairs, entertain black-walnut cousins at early dinner, and be waited on by Margery. Irony took her by the throat.

"I'm not really good," whispered Angela Boyce to herself; "I'm only conventional." She felt as battered as if she had lain awake all night to come to that conclusion.

After the pronouncement, she rang for Ellen, telephoned for the motor, and went about her business. She cabled as coherently as she could, with a sharp pain through her body that made breathing difficult; she telegraphed to Owen; she had the trunks sent home; she herself returned to her stripped and shining rooms; she met old Margery with a grim smile. On her desk lay her letter to Monica. Her first impulse was to burn it; but after five minutes' reflection she locked it away. Sometime, when she was very old, she thought, she might like to know how she had felt when she was happy.

PEARLS

PEARLS

IF any one else cares to add anything to the tale of the Pierce Parmenters, he is more than welcome. I don't know why I should have had it on my hands at all, save that odd things are always coming my way. Some minor power sees to it that I shall live in an emotional junk-shop: you can find pretty nearly any kind of second-hand tragedy you like, if you care to wander about my premises. I seem to myself to be a "fence" for the Fates: the stolen things that people leave verbally on my hands, and then never come back to redeem! Now I've grown so much into the character that I melt them down or invent pedigrees for them, and sell them when I can. Of course, there are a few queer, old-fashioned objects that no one will buy; they'll just rot away in the back of my shop. But I could melt down the Pierce Parmenters, and here they are. No one will trace the stuff unless he knows more about it than I do.

It was ironic enough that the Parmenters should

PEARLS

have come to my place at all. Pierce Parmenter was a sculptor; and I can't, for the most part, endure artists. I like the created thing well enough—if it's really good—but I prefer the creator to be mouldering in his grave. I don't want to have to think about him. As for studios, there's something tawdry in the best of them; and as for the kind of talk that goes on in them—well, I hate the artistic jargon worse than any other. I'd rather hear a plumber talk about his drains.

So, you see, I was not exactly predestined to like Pierce Parmenter or his little ways. And yet I did like him—and Mrs. Pierce, too. She seemed to me to stand chronic underfeeding about as gracefully as mortal woman could. The studio itself was less objectionable than most; it didn't look like a Turkish corner presided over by a fitful intelligence. It was a big, workmanlike barn of a room in which Parmenter's clay didn't look out of place. They never talked about Parmenter's work; partly, I dare say, because it wasn't a cheerful subject. When I went there occasionally of an evening, and saw a big, unshapely mass hidden under wet cloths, I never

PEARLS

asked after its health, and they never vouchsafed information. Corinna, the one child, was a half-grown girl when I first knew them. She had nice, grave manners, and said very little; I imagine she was educated as casually as she was clothed. I gathered that the mere fact of her existence had always been a great worry to her parents. They were obviously fond of her; but she was a responsibility that, considering the high cost of living, they could hardly bear. Now and then Parmenter had a streak of luck—an order for something municipal or mortuary—and they would riot off to Europe on what was left after the rent was paid.

You see, I didn't know the Parmenters early; and most of the causes of things I have to guess at. But they bore the traits of a conventional past. I don't hear much gossip of the art world, but I should guess that he had taken prizes, and shown great promise, and married on the strength of what people said about him. She believed in him, I always fancied, in a quiet way, but thought it better taste not to ram him down people's throats. They never apologized for being so hard up; they never blamed the stupidity

PEARLS

of the public. They would have muddled along well enough, I imagine, if it hadn't been for Corinna. Corinna was their perpetual punishment for having been impractical. Day by day, the fear of not giving Corinna her due was written blacker on their brows. . . . I am setting down all that I conscientiously can, because, in point of fact, the incidents of which this story is made were never comprehensible to me. There must have been every kind of passion behind what actually happened, and yet I know no more than you what those passions were. I could only guess, and I record my impressions merely in order to give cleverer persons any clue there is. The Parmenters' surface, to the outsider's eye, was what I tell you.

By the time I had known the Parmenters for some years, their changeless plight took on, even to a casual observer like me, the aspect of development. They were so up against it, I suppose, that optimism seemed a blasphemy against the Most High. They didn't complain explicitly, but the mechanism creaked and groaned and threatened to wrench itself to pieces some fine day. Mrs. Parmenter's dresses were

PEARLS

more luridly out of style than ever—even I could see that. She must have been clever with her needle, because, though they had always been poor, she had always looked, vaguely, at least, like other women. Now probably courage had forsaken her—or the price of thread had gone up. Corinna had a hungry expression and a perpetual cold in her head—from shivering in the studio, probably. Parmenter himself looked ready to murder anybody. I did offer to lend him money, as tactfully as I could, but unluckily he knew that I had no health and only a small annuity to live on. He wouldn't take it. "Once I would have, thanks," he said, "but now it would be too silly to call it a loan—it would be highway robbery." The only thing I could do was to invent feast-days and arrive, laden with fruits and sweets, at the dinner-hour. The Parmenters were no more "Bohemian" than poverty forced them to be; but I have always held that any one who lives in a studio is entitled, on occasion, to a certain lack of consideration. I did like the Parmenters, you see, though I hate artists; and I still like the unexpectedness of their fifth act. You could never have dreamed, be-

PEARLS

fore that came on, that there was any drama at all. But it makes the case practically insoluble—and is a rattling argument against the beautiful, civilized tradition of consuming your own smoke on your own premises.

It was Corinna's birthday: the occasion on which that unlucky atom could count sixteen summers. "Sixteen winters would be more like it," I reflected at the confectioner's, for the essential wintriness of poverty has always been vivid to my mind. Confections were all very well, but one couldn't make a square meal of them. To ask the Parmenters to a restaurant was impossible, because the women wouldn't have any clothes they thought they could wear. Nor would they thank me for turning caterer people in on them. A hamper and a cab was my decision; and I groaned for Paris, where these things seem more plausible. I didn't forewarn them; there was no such luck as their being able, themselves, to provide a feast for Corinna. Nor did it occur to me that any one else might be arriving with chicken and champagne under his arm. They had come to be the loneliest mortals of my acquaintance. I found

PEARLS

myself regretting, as I drove through the dark side streets, that they had to keep up anything so expensive as a studio. I am sure that three fourths of what they had went in rent. Yet space was the one thing Parmenter couldn't do without; they would always, if only for dignity's sake, have to be sacrificed to room for those huge clay effigies of failure. But these were no thoughts for Corinna's birthday. I hung the hamper on my arm and rang the bell.

Mrs. Parmenter opened the door—it was a long time since they had kept a servant. I had expected to have to apologize for bringing my dinner with me, but though Grace Parmenter took in the situation before I crossed the threshold—a hamper with a bottle sticking out of it tells its own story—she met it as gracefully as if she were Marie Antoinette at the Little Trianon.

“A party for Corinna! How charming!” And she drew me into the kitchenette. “We hadn't provided a thing—we've been so busy. And ten minutes ago I was saying just that to Pierce. What a beautiful picnic!” Her capable hands were already unpacking

PEARLS

and disposing of the contents of the basket. "You've even brought ice for the champagne. Magnificent!"

I watched her as she moved swiftly about the closet of a room. I was very grateful to have my action taken in the spirit of a "lark," though I hadn't wholly expected it. I had always found Grace Parmenter a simple, sympathetic creature on every ground but the domestic one. She guarded her own hearthstone as distrustfully as a cave-woman. Even with the excuse of Corinna, I had trembled a little. But to-night she was all civilization, with more than a hint of the great lady who can afford to accept a gift because she has herself bestowed so much more than she will ever receive. Even her faded *djibbah* looked like the whim of a woman who has her closets full of "creations." I took off my hat to Grace Parmenter: it was stunning to see her take a spurt like that. If she handled the food a little too lovingly and carefully—well, even that, somehow, had only the look of superfine manners. Finally she gave me a gentle push.

"Go into the studio and talk to the others. Keep them amused. This won't take long. Tell Corinna

PEARLS

to set the table. She'll need every scrap of china we've got."

I rather dreaded to go into the studio. It was inconceivable that the man and the child should keep it up so beautifully as the woman did. But I saw, when I got in, that they had at least managed to pay Corinna the tribute of a wood fire; that Corinna was flushed, either with warmth or with excitement; and that Pierce Parmenter was actually walking up and down, with his hands in his pockets, whistling. The latest masterpiece (they may have been masterpieces, for all I know) was pushed into a corner, and, thanks to the hour, the fire, the unwonted number of candles, you wouldn't have known there was a north light in the place. The furniture, of course, was almost negligible, but I hadn't for years seen the room look so gay. They had, perhaps out of compliment to Corinna, clothed their shabbiness with spirit. Really, they *were* "good people," to pretend for that frail mite of a hostage that life could be gay. Of course, it was their duty—no one has a right to launch a child into a world of immitigable gloom—but I hadn't blamed

PEARLS

them, these last months, for finding their duty almost impossible.

I congratulated Corinna, gave her her mother's message, and slapped Parmenter on the shoulder. He responded in kind. It was like the old days when I had first known them—no, it wasn't: it was like some prehistoric time before I had met them, for he had never been like that. I wondered if he had a big order, at last, but decided that was impossible. Even Mrs. Parmenter couldn't have concealed that from me for five minutes. Anyhow, I was glad of the spirit that reigned, even if it was only a feverish bluff for Corinna's sake. I wouldn't think about the morrow, when the north light would come into its own again. I was very glad that I had brought champagne.

Between Corinna and her mother, dinner was soon ready. We sat down, almost merrily. There was some tinkling echo in their talk and laughter (I did my part, but I couldn't keep it up as they did) of the classic carelessness of Murger's world. That must have been the mood, I told myself, in which they had incurred the responsibility of Corinna.

PEARLS

Brave and dear and decent of them it was, to resurrect it for her on her birthday. And yet, though I tried to ward off the reflection, it was, all of it, just a little too feverish. It hadn't the steady glow of assurance.

When the champagne was poured, I took a box out of my pocket. "They're 'scientific,' my child—not real, alas! But they are supposed to be as good as the hand of man can make them—guaranteed to look well round that charming neck of yours." And I tossed the string of pearls over to Corinna, opposite me.

"Oh, how good of you!" she stammered. And she fingered them absently.

I wondered if I had made a mistake; if I ought to have given her something warm to wear, instead. But, hang it! I couldn't have. The little necklace was my part in the beautiful bluff of Corinna's sixteenth birthday. My trinket had seemed to me, ever since I came into the studio, precisely like the Parmenters' gayety: not the real thing, but the best imitation man could devise.

Then Corinna blushed penitently and put them on.

PEARLS

They became her well, and lent an air to her shabby little blouse.

Mrs. Parmenter delayed, for a moment, to say anything graceful. She looked across to her husband. "They're becoming, aren't they, Pierce?"

He set his glass down with a crash (we were drinking that excellent wine out of thick kitchen tumblers). He, too, was flushed. They were all flushed, as if some common emotion thrilled them. I was embarrassed; I felt "out of it"; and instinctively I put up my hand to my own cheek to see if my face felt hot. It didn't; my habitual pallor had presumably not forsaken me. But a curious, intangible barrier seemed to rise between them and me.

Parmenter, meanwhile, was feeling in the pocket of his worn Norfolk jacket. Presently he laid something down on the table beside him, with a cautious gesture. A biggish lump of discolored cotton lay for an instant before him, directly beneath the candle. Then he touched it again, unrolling the cotton. "How about these?" he asked. "Put them on, kid."

"Oh no!" broke from Mrs. Parmenter.

PEARLS

“Oh no—not *on!*” more feebly, from the girl.

And Parmenter’s attempt to handle his treasure carelessly broke down. All three bent their heads over the thing that lay in front of him—with awe, worshippingly, quite forgetting me.

I leaned back to get my own head out of the circle. I could only wait for Parmenter to explain. I knew nothing about precious stones, but from the quality of the homage Parmenter’s pearls drew I knew they must be real. They were Mammon in his most ethereal disguise; but none the less they brought oily greed into the eyes that were contemplating them. Even Corinna, shabby, frail, as ignorant of jewels as of Prester John, hung over them with parted lips.

“Put them on,” said her father again, and held out the long necklace to her.

“Oh no! I should never be able to wear these—after.” She curled her fingers round my gift upon her throat. Then she bit her lip and glanced at me apologetically.

Parmenter twisted the pearls in his strong white fingers, improvising a kind of cat’s-cradle with them.

PEARLS

"Pierce, don't!" said Grace Parmenter, her face white.

I began to wonder if I shouldn't have to remind them that I didn't in the least understand what was going on. Whether the pearls had been with them for days or hours, they had had time to cast their spell. Already the religion of them seemed to be familiar to the three.

Suddenly Parmenter freed one of his hands from the milky coil. "More champagne for every one!" And he poured the stuff into our tumblers with his right hand, while his left hand held the pearls negligently. He lifted his glass and drank. Then he turned to me. "I forgot you didn't know about my great adventure. We must seem awful fools. Want a bit of melodrama to go on with?"

"I should think so!"

"Feel them! Lift them!" He placed the necklace in my hand. "Aren't they beauties?"

I fingered them carefully, and quite ignorantly. "I dare say they're very fine. I don't know a thing about pearls. Corinna's, over there, look just as good to me."

PEARLS

He snatched them back, with a laugh. "Corinna's? Very pretty; but do you mean to say you don't see the difference?"

"I can't say it would worry me."

"Look at them, man! Look at the skin; look at the lustre; feel the weight! These are priceless."

"I hope they are yours." I spoke lightly. Parmenter had no right to a taste for pearls.

He made an inarticulate sound not unlike a groan. "I wish they were. I used to know something about jewels. They wouldn't be thrown away on me, I assure you. But, to the best of my belief, they belong to Mrs. Barry Bettelheim. You've heard of the lady?"

"If I've read the newspapers the last week, I have."

"Exactly." And Parmenter drained his glass and pushed his chair away from the table. "Come over into the sitting-room and have a cigarette, and I'll tell you about it."

"Don't tell it until we get through!" Corinna stood, eager, with a plate in each hand. But her mother called her curtly into the kitchenette. The sitting-room, however, was only a corner of the

PEARLS

studio not sufficiently removed from the dining-room end to prevent our talk from being audible to the two women as they passed to and fro; and the sculptor paid no attention to his daughter's request, perhaps for that reason. He laid the pearls carefully on the table while he lighted his cigarette, but took them up again immediately afterwards—as if he couldn't bear to be separated from them, even by a few inches.

“Then you ought to have recognized these from the description. I did—bang off. Of course I knew, the minute I saw them, that they were the real thing. Beauties like that don't go unappreciated by a man of discernment. It's supposed to be, for connoisseurs, the finest string in America; and I believe it. Look at them!”

He held them under the lamp for me to see. Such is the influence of superstition that I, too, began to feel an æsthetic—almost a moral—contempt for the rather pretty necklace I had given Corinna.

“But, confound it, where *did* you see them? How do they happen to be here? Aren't you afraid of the police?”

PEARLS

"I am." Grace Parmenter's voice came from the middle distance, where she hovered, bat-like in her trailing black *djibbah*, about the deserted dining-table.

"The police?" Pierce Parmenter laughed aloud. "They would have to be cleverer than apparently they are, to trace anything to me. But it all goes to show what I've always believed: it's only to the spendthrift that luck comes. I took a taxi this morning. Imagine it!"

My face, in spite of me, may have shown that I couldn't imagine it, for he went on with a sort of jaunty embarrassment: "My arms were full of bundles. I had been doing errands for the family." He spared me the complete explanation; but I knew, as well as if he had told me, that his womenfolk aired their shabbiness in public as little as possible. "You remember the cloudburst we had in the middle of the day? It was either a taxi or having to get my only decent clothes elaborately pressed. I did some mental arithmetic and decided that a taxi was good economy. Besides, I had an important engagement this afternoon. See?"

I saw—it was very simple.

PEARLS

“Well, I made the most of my taxi. I spread out all my twopenny bundles on the seat and pretended for half a mile that the damned thing belonged to me. It almost seemed as if it did.” Parmenter chuckled. I believe for a moment the pride of the taxi made him forget the pearls. “When I got out, I gathered my belongings up; they slipped and sprawled, but I got them all in hand, finally, paid my man, made one dash through the rain into the house, and threw everything on the divan. I didn’t look at my precious purchases for two hours afterwards. When I did, I found that cotton roll curled up and gone to sleep in one of the wrapping-papers that had got loose and strayed over the seat of the cab. I opened it, wondering what I had bought that could have been wrapped up in soiled absorbent cotton. And, pat as you please, out rolled these beauties!”

Parmenter lighted another cigarette with quivering fingers.

“I didn’t know the chauffeur’s number, of course. I didn’t take him from a taxi-stand. He wandered by, and I hailed him wildly, with one arm, without even

PEARLS

looking at him. The rain was like a wall, at that moment, and my cheek was tucked comfortably against it. I couldn't have slewed round to scrutinize him if I had wanted to. Shouldn't know him from a wooden image if I ever saw him again. So—he won't bulk big in my official report. Only get him into trouble, probably." He cocked his eye at me, but I didn't answer. I wanted to get at something much more fundamental than Parmenter's attitude to the chauffeur.

The women had returned by this time. Grace Parmenter sat opposite me, on the other side of the table. A triangle of tarnished gold embroidery set in the neck of her shapeless garment relieved the faded whiteness of her throat. Below, the drapery flowed into shadow that the feeble lamplight did not touch. Corinna had placed herself on the arm of her father's chair, one arm curled round his neck.

"I take it, from the advertisements, that what Mrs. Barry Bettelheim wants is her necklace," he went on. "No point in making a fortune for the detectives. What difference does it make how they got there? Some one must have had a blue funk,

PEARLS

or they would have been after the taxi long ago, and I should have been followed up. But I really think the sooner I am rid of these things the better. If I had a bank-account of only three figures, I'd keep them."

"Pierce!" This came from the listless Mrs. Parmenter.

"Well, I would. You don't know what they've done to me. Time was when I thought I should some day hang a string like this round your neck, Grace. Fancy looking at diamonds when you can get pearls! Diamonds are all right for clasps and such, but I wouldn't take the Cullinan for a perfectly matched string like this. Pearls! They lead a man on like Artemis—be hanged to her!" He muttered the last words under his breath, and hung over the gems as they lay quiescent in the circle of light from the lamp.

I had never seen Pierce Parmenter like this; and I marvelled not a little. It had long been known to me that every man's imagination has a weak spot. Deal him a light blow there, and you can lead him any crazy dance you like—if you don't kill him out-

PEARLS

right. But who could ever have guessed that Parmenter's point of psychic vulnerability would be pearls? Yes; it's one of the very queerest things that ever came my way. That futile, shabby studio; that worn and shabby woman opposite; that starved and shabby girl—and Parmenter, the shabby creator of that interior, drunk over a string of pearls that didn't belong to him; that were as far removed from him, in reality, as the original ooze whence the diver had risen. Who could have guessed?

I roused myself to speak, but Parmenter was going on with his murmured incantation.

“Think of the seas that were searched before these were gathered together! Sulu, the Persian Gulf, Shark's Bay, the Gambier Islands—no, those have a tinge of bronze; they wouldn't be admitted here—New Guinea! They've dredged the deep for beauty, and, my God! they've got it. *Meleagrina vulgaris*! And it hangs round the sallow neck of a Mrs. Barry Bettelheim: a thin-chested woman with a voice like dried peas in a gourd, and not a single self-respecting curve in her body—a woman who would have to be modelled in brick!”

PEARLS

It is needless to point out that Parmenter knew nothing whatever of Mrs. Barry Bettelheim. It was needless to point it out to him. He was simply working himself up into a jealous, lyric hatred of the woman to whom the pearls belonged. He had to believe her that sort of spectacle, or his pessimism would have been left in the lurch.

"If you are so sure that they are Mrs. Bettelheim's pearls, why don't you tell her so?"

"Sure? Man, I tell you I *know*. I don't expect you to know for yourself. I dare say you never saw a perfectly matched string before in your life, but I have—in Paris. And besides, I *know*, I tell you. I was brought up on them. My father taught me. He was a diamond merchant, until the family fortunes went to pot. I knew things about 'skin' and 'orient' before you were born. My mother had some beauties. The last of them went to pay her burial expenses."

He jerked the words out harshly. I hadn't meant to turn the poisoned barb in the wound; I had meant only to extract it. So I went on as soothingly as I could.

PEARLS

"Perhaps she's all you say, but in any case they belong to her."

"Oh!" He flung himself back in his chair. "She may be better than I think for—carats and carats better. But she isn't worth them. Who is? Grace there, perhaps."

He smiled wearily at his wife. "Grace's lines are perfect. I'd like to do her rising from the sea—with the pearls on." His voice still chanted.

"Pierce, stop talking nonsense!" Mrs. Parmenter colored authoritatively and leaned forward. Her eyes were shining, but not with the trance-like glitter of her husband's. He had the indescribable de-personalized look of the person controlled from without. Mrs. Bettelheim's necklace might have been a first-class hypnotist.

He shook himself a little. "Nonsense? Thank you, my dear! I'm talking according to the gospel of people with a sense of beauty. Don't begin, at this late date, to prate about heresy."

"I won't. But something has to be done, as you well know. If you don't do it soon, we may all get into trouble."

PEARLS

She spoke very quietly, trying evidently to break the "control." Corinna sat motionless, turning her dark eyes from one parent to the other.

Again he shook himself—as if to help his wife in her task.

"Of course. And therefore, violating every law of my nature, I'm going to try to borrow some money of my good friend here, so that I can take the early morning train to Chicago—before any of their damned clues get working. I know a lawyer fellow there who'll see me through. By the day after tomorrow, Mrs. Bettelheim shall have her pearls. If she looks like the Wrath of God in them, it isn't my fault."

"Money all you like, my dear fellow," I said. "But, after all, you don't know they're hers. Even experts are often deceived."

He gave me a glance of unutterable scorn. "The size, the number, the clasp—they all fit the published description. As for the stones themselves—oh, my God!" (he flung up his arms in angry despair) "how can I make this numskull realize that I know? I suppose you think that you could go into a de-

PEARLS

partment store and duplicate that marvel of the great deep!"

"Well, well, grant it, then," I murmured. "But aren't you afraid of your life to have the things in your pocket?"

He grew calmer. "No, I'm not. The people, whoever they are, had them for several days. Probably they were going to take them to Europe. They may have been under suspicion, for they haven't ventured to break the thing up and market any of them. It's no time to market them, for that matter, when the whole public is thinking pearls as hard as it can. If they know where they lost the things, it's evident they didn't dare to follow them up directly—more likely they're playing cross-tag all over town trying to find out where they did lose them. If they had known, and hadn't been frightened, they wouldn't have given me so much time as this to take them to headquarters. If they didn't know—well, then they're probably cutting one another's throats out of pure suspicion, in some low dive or other. No; I'm not afraid. At the same time, I'm not delaying any more than I have to."

P E A R L S

“But, in Heaven’s name, why *haven’t* you taken them to headquarters?”

Parmenter flushed. “You can’t understand the mere luxury of having them quietly here for a few hours? No? Well—let that pass. I want their journey back to Mrs. Barry Bettelheim to be as direct as possible. I don’t want an endless tie-up with authorities here. I don’t want anything to do with detectives until I’ve delivered the pearls. Then they can ask me anything they want to. And”—he faced me squarely—“I can’t afford to behave like a nobleman in the matter; I want the reward. I want the whole of it, and I want it as soon as possible. If I arrive, introduced by a responsible person, I don’t think there’ll be much difficulty in getting it. Any one who has ever owned those pearls would give anything—up to their price—to get them back. Her neck’s aching for ’em. And, fatuous though it may sound, I don’t think I look like a thief. She’ll stump up, as she’s promised—in cold cash, I shouldn’t wonder. Fifteen thousand isn’t much, and I heartily wish I could afford to make her a handsome bow and refuse it. But I’m in a position where I can’t. See?”

PEARLS

And Mrs. Parmenter, who had been listening tensely to her husband's speech, leaned back with an air of relief. "Do you see?" she echoed, turning to me. "The reward: that's what we have a right to. No one can say we haven't a right to that."

"No, of course not," I agreed. After all, one wouldn't blame the man in the street for taking a reward for honesty; and the street can hardly have been colder than Parmenter's studio. I wasn't going to cavil at their point of view. At the same time, I wished they would take it more lightly. They were too theatrical by half. The pearls had cast a spell—with their necessarily romantic life history, their tale of deep waters and strange journeys and mortal greed, before that flawless company was assembled. Very pretty, all the sound and light of that history, but too heady for a starving man. I was beginning to be hypnotized, too: the very candles of the studio seemed to give forth a milky, iridescent light. Those pearls were simply all over the place.

The end of it was that I left Parmenter money enough to go on to Chicago with—and that I turned up at his early train to make sure he hadn't been murdered in the night. He was right as could be;

PEARLS

and even dank dawn in the big terminal couldn't dim the convinced gleam of his eyes. My conviction had lasted as well; and when he got on the train, I was as unable as he to doubt that he was to swing straight across half a dozen States to a fifteen-thousand-dollar goal.

"Your luck has turned, Pierce," I murmured.

"Oh, they make or mar a man—those things!" he answered. And I was glad to recognize, as the train pulled out, that he had sense enough to be cryptic in his hour of triumph.

I turned up later in the day at the studio, but no one answered my ring. The fact that the women had gone out, while it disappointed, reassured me. I had been afraid of finding them in a wretched huddle of reaction. They could take care of themselves, I thought, if the wave of confidence had carried them out into the chill winter world. I didn't go again until I thought there had been time for them to hear from Parmenter in Chicago.

This time, again, my ring was unanswered, but I would not be foiled. I knew where this casual family left its door-key, and I let myself in.

PEARLS

For a moment I was so chilled by the atmosphere of the studio that I paid attention to nothing but fetching wood and lighting a fire. When the blaze was well started, I looked about to find the least uncomfortable of the chairs. I knew it well: if you placed yourself in it at just the right angle, and didn't sit too long, you might escape a backache. There it was, over by the veiled masterpiece. (The pearls, such was their devilish power, had convinced me also that Pierce's things must be masterpieces.) It was filled with stuff—packages of every kind. I spun quickly round, so that the separate corners of the studio defiled before me, like a moving-picture film. Everything was filled with packages: it was like the night before Christmas—boxes and bundles on every hand. Some of them had been opened, and inexplicable fragments of delicate hue surged softly over the edges. "They've looted the town!" I murmured. "Pierce must have got his reward."

I lifted a garment of flame-colored gauze, box and all, off the least-laden chair, and sat down by the fire. It was all very well, I reflected, but at that rate they might be buying pearls themselves. I had been

PEARLS

imagining solid improvements for the studio: sensible things, like electric light and upholstered furniture, and big rugs of a quiet pattern. The place was as cheerless as ever; the old sticks were the same; but a pair of small pearl-beaded slippers stood on the one cheap rug. "Pearls again!" I groaned to myself; and I began to be decidedly uncomfortable. It wasn't my business—oh, no; but I seemed to be in the presence of temerity on a grand scale, and I felt involved as by some great natural upheaval. An earthquake or a tidal wave is every one's affair. It wasn't that I minimized the purchasing power of fifteen thousand; but the Parmenters seemed to me to have grown overweening on the strength of it. One can never afford to be overweening. And while I was thus cheerlessly musing, the door was flung open, and Mrs. Parmenter and Corinna came in. One glance showed me that they were laden with more packages.

Grace Parmenter was flushed and excited, but unembarrassed, as she greeted me. Before she had disposed of her bundles she began to explain, in a voice at least two tones higher than any I had ever

PEARLS

heard her use. She apologized for the disorder of the place, and swept things away, right and left, piling them up in corners with a careless hand. Then she flung off her long fur coat. "It isn't mine, you know," she laughed. "I borrowed it from Maisie Tyler to shop in. It's wonderful to be able to borrow again. For ages we haven't felt at liberty to. But I couldn't go to a decent shop in my rags. Corinna didn't matter; they were welcome to think her a *protégée* of mine."

She came over and warmed her hands at the fire I had built. "We went to Benton's. I used to have an account there always, though it's years since I've used it. Corinna, love"—she spoke to the girl over her shoulder—"go and change into something nice: that velvet thing we got yesterday." Corinna selected an armful of boxes and disappeared.

Grace Parmenter flung her head back. "Oh, to be civilized again!—it's wine to the spirit."

But I had to ask my burning question: "Then you've heard from Pierce?"

"'From Pierce?'" she echoed. "Not a word. There's hardly been time yet."

PEARLS

"But you're quite sure of the fifteen thousand?"

She looked at me incredulously.

"You don't mean that you aren't?"

"I'm not sure of anything in a world like this."

Her eyebrows went up a little scornfully. It was a new experience to be scorned by Mrs. Parmenter, and I tried to enjoy the experience. "My dear man, you didn't half appreciate those pearls. You didn't see how incapable they were of being anything but what they were. Ah, the beauties!" A long, gluttonous sigh escaped her.

"Oh, I haven't yet lost faith in the pearls. Parmenter knows, I don't doubt."

"Knows—I should think he did! Didn't you see how he loved them? If he weren't such a *galantuomo*, I should have feared he would never part with them."

"You can trust Pierce to be honest, I think."

She laughed. "Pierce is honest enough. I'm afraid it's not *that* that would worry me. But suppose he didn't bring back the reward! Corinna needs it."

"Don't you need it more?"

"I? Oh, I'm dead and done for. I've nothing left but my figure—and I should have been fat by this

PEARLS

time if I'd had enough to eat." It was the first time Grace Parmenter had ever explicitly admitted privation, and it was very strange to hear her do it thus, tossing it to me in the tone of gayety, with her head flung back. "But Corinna—Corinna's a beauty, if you but knew it. And if this hadn't turned up, I should presently have done something desperate, myself. No consideration of any sort would have prevented me much longer from giving Corinna what her beauty needed. I would have killed for that money!"

The maternal passion often manifests itself strangely; I had lived long enough to know that. But Grace Parmenter's passion seemed to me really in excess of what the case demanded. Corinna had, for years, been clothed like a stage orphan, and I had often been sorry; but I had never thought of Corinna as a princess in rags.

"Wait; you'll see." Mrs. Parmenter went on: "You don't believe me, because you've never seen her in a decent dress. I tell you she's a marvel. And I, who know what it is to lose everything God gave you for want of a few things out of the devil's store-

PEARLS

house—no, I wouldn't have put up with it much longer for Corinna. Pierce is done for, too; he'll never make good"—she said it as lightly as if she hadn't been posturing, for years, before the shrine—"but Corinna shall. He and I are failures, if you like. All the more reason why we shouldn't stand in our daughter's way. I said I would have killed for that money, did I? Well, I would. I'd have killed Pierce, if necessary!" Her smile tried to take the edge off her statement, but it didn't wholly succeed; perhaps because her smile showed all her teeth. Was the cub worth the tigress's snap, I wondered. And I wondered, too, whether this was a mere brief delirium or whether it was an old madness working to the surface.

"How long have you felt this way?" I was very curious; I had to ask. And, apparently, she didn't mind saying anything.

She answered quite simply: "About two years, I fancy—ever since I saw that it was Corinna, and not we, who had the right to survive. Ever since I saw Corinna was going to be a tearing beauty."

"And what does her father feel?"

PEARLS

"Does any one know what Pierce feels?" She had grown very grave. "An unhappy person is very self-centred, you know. I fancy he may have had his own particular hell; but mine has been so hot I haven't had a chance to explore his."

I said earlier that I never understood the Parmenters. Well, less than ever at that moment did I understand them. Apparently I had for years been tiptoeing ignorantly round a tragedy. It was too late now to pick up the threads of the plot; but I longed for Pierce Parmenter in the flesh. To me then, as always, he was the central figure of the drama.

"Corinna, where are you?" The mother's voice rang impatiently. She was in tremendous haste to produce her miracle, poor woman.

"Coming!" The voice was faint and preoccupied.

"And are all these things hers?" I waved my hand vaguely.

"Not quite all. We lost our heads. But most of them are." Then she bent her head to mine. "I really have some strength of character: I've never told her what her looks are worth. But now she'll know—she'll know for all time."

PEARLS

“And you aren’t afraid of destiny?” I murmured.

“I believe in *her* destiny. There she comes.” And instinctively we drew apart to watch the girl enter the studio.

Well, I had to say this for Grace Parmenter: however freely she might have eaten of the insane root, her eyes had remained clearer than any of ours. For Corinna, dressed in Benton’s importations, was anything but the Corinna I had known. If I didn’t see all that her mother saw in her, I saw enough at least to convince me that her mother’s enthusiasm was only a little premature. Plump her out a little, and assure her of her fate, and she would be all that Grace Parmenter said. Her gawkinsness had melted into grace; excitement had chased away her pallor; and, instead of looking starved, she looked mysterious. I never want to see a stage orphan again!

“You’re very pretty, my child.” I should have been turned neck and crop out of the studio if I hadn’t said as much as that—or, at least, that’s what I believed.

“*Pretty!*” murmured Grace Parmenter under her breath. “Come here. Your hat’s wrong.” And the

PEARLS

mother's thin hand pushed it to its proper angle. "Your hair needs to come *so*—but there's time enough to learn all that."

The longer my eyes rested on Corinna, the more they discovered in her. Yes, she was—she would be—exquisite. Then Mrs. Parmenter clapped her hands. "Your furs, child. Go and get them. This costume really needs them."

And Corinna, precociously in the spirit of the play, turned and ran. It may have been the high heels, or the unaccustomed length of skirt (I had never seen her in a dress that wasn't half-way up to her knees), or it may have been the mere excitement of the plunge for the furs—in any case, she tripped as she went, and knocked down her father's modelling-stand. The little clay figure on it went smashing to the floor, and Corinna stood, dismayed, above the powdery fragments.

"Never mind that. I'll sweep it up later." Mrs. Parmenter's voice rang out authoritatively, and her daughter disappeared into the bedroom. Then Mrs. Parmenter turned to me with a face of tragedy.

PEARLS

"It's a frightful pity," I hastened to say. "He's been working on it for a long time, hasn't he?"

"Oh, that? That doesn't matter," she murmured. "I was just thinking what hard luck it is she shouldn't have those pearls round her neck. She has just the skin for pearls—and so few dark-haired women have."

It was only too clear that my star would set in the sky in which Corinna's rose. Corinna's future made me feel very old. But there she was, back again, and I had to praise the silver furs that completed the frame. The indomitable mother not only led me to the water; she made me drink.

Then the bell jangled, and I reached for my hat and coat. I simply couldn't, glad as I was for my friends' luck, endure any more parcels. There was no weight, however, for this messenger to stagger under—he carried only a telegram. I signed for Mrs. Parmenter and sent the boy away, while she tore the envelope open. I put on my coat and took up my hat before I turned.

Grace Parmenter was holding the telegram in one hand and clutching the rickety table with the

PEARLS

other. Her face was lifelessly white; it showed, for the first time, all the ravages that she had been at such pitiful pains to conceal. Her features were left helpless in that instant; for Grace Parmenter's indomitable spirit was temporarily snuffed out. The hollows and sagging muscles told of hunger and weariness and premature age; all the little unlovely wrinkles about the eyes and mouth said, more plainly than my words can tell it, that resentment had followed close on unsatisfied desires. The eyes—they were both mad and dead. There was no health in that face; the pallor turned gray on the temples and yellow at the throat. She was simply a dangerous relic of sanity; and I saw like a flash that there must have been a well-nigh interminable prelude to the passionate moment I had just witnessed. That one glimpse of Grace Parmenter off her guard is the only clue I have ever had to what had preceded the sordid fifth act. Corinna, who had been a bore, was now an idol; and 'ware anything that stood in the way of her mother's idolatry! She had gone over to Baal, and, whatever was in the telegram, I pitied Pierce Parmenter. His wife, I was sure, cared for him now

PEARLS

only as he could serve Corinna's beauty. I pitied Corinna a little, too: it was so clear that her mother intended to drain that cup until she found oblivion. She intended her daughter to have everything she hadn't had; and woe to Corinna if she refused to take from life a single thing that Grace Parmenter's empty hands coveted. It was sublime, if you like, that the mother could be content with the daughter's success; but it was going to be very hard on Corinna.

At last Mrs. Parmenter pulled herself together and held out the telegram to me. I scented disaster—the fumes of it were so strong in the air that I couldn't read the sulphurous yellow missive at once, and I stood helpless, holding it.

Corinna, who had been mutely watching from a distance, crept nearer. Her little moment was over, by the way. She shrank visibly within her toggery. I can't explain to you the odd change—as if she had been filling her lungs with confidence like ozone, and the supply were now withdrawn from the circumambient air. She might, a week since, have looked to her mother like a princess in disguise; just now, she looked to me—poor thing!—like a goose-girl at

PEARLS

court. I was sorry for the child, since so much was expected of her, and as yet she depended pathetically on others for her beauty. I couldn't look at her long.

"Hasn't Pierce got the reward?" No one wants to read a telegram that has produced such an effect. I preferred to take it, exaggerated, if necessary, from the victim.

"Oh yes, he's got it." Mrs. Parmenter's tone had no life in it.

"Well, then!" I exclaimed cheerfully. And I dropped my eyes on the words themselves.

Strength returned to Grace Parmenter as suddenly as it had left her. She began to pace up and down the studio with long, lunging steps, like an animal testing wind and limb before a contest. "The beast! The beast!" she murmured.

"What is it, mamma?" The wail broke from the overtaxed child.

"It's the last sin of a weak, wicked man!" Head up, Grace Parmenter proclaimed her interpretation of the telegram.

"Let me see!" And Corinna held out her hand.

I folded up the telegram and gave it back to

PEARLS

Mrs. Parmenter. She thrust it into the bosom of her dress.

"I'm not going to give poison to my child," she declared. "And I won't curse him before you, either, my pet," she said, with a kind of insane gentleness.

"Why should you curse him at all?" I broke out. "He's probably had a bad time, too."

"I don't doubt it," she returned. "It used to be very bad, and I don't imagine it's got any better since he stopped talking to me about it." She spoke still with that insane gentleness. I could not, for the life of me, help thinking of a cunning lunatic who is very quiet before he springs at his keeper. Then I took pity on the helpless agony of the young creature.

"He is sending you a thousand dollars, Corinna, my love," I said. "And he's going away to the other side of the world for a little. But he'll come back, never fear. You and your mother will just have to wait for him quietly. Perhaps he'll do a masterpiece over in the antipodes."

"Pierce? A masterpiece!" Mrs. Parmenter

PEARLS

laughed. "Never, never, never. His brain wouldn't hold a masterpiece."

"Corinna, child, go and take off those hot things." I threw another log on the fire to justify my assumption of an overheated atmosphere. This was no talk for her to be hearing.

She slunk away like a ten-year-old. "Must I take them off?" She stood a moment in the doorway, slowly unwinding her furs.

"Of course." Mrs. Parmenter's tone was harsh, but her harshness was not intended for Corinna. "They'll have to go back. Why, we've spent nearly a thousand! Don't muss them. I'll keep something for looks, but it can't be much."

Corinna, still fingering the furs, disappeared.

"Can't I give her the furs?" I whispered.

"My good friend, you couldn't afford them."

I had no reply for that. Probably I couldn't.

"What are you going to do?" I had to ask Grace Parmenter that before I left. Every drop of my liking for her was gone, but I pitied her. Pity is only a black sediment at the bottom of the cup, though. I was aching to be gone.

PEARLS

"What you suggested—wait for Pierce." The ironic twang she gave the words was indescribable.

"What is he up to, do you think?"

She shrugged her shoulders recklessly. A worn seam in her sleeve ripped just a little. I can't tell you how tragic it made the gesture.

"He's off, somewhere, for more pearls. He is mad, perfectly mad."

"For more pearls? You don't find strings like Mrs. Barry Bettelheim's in the other hemisphere."

"No, but you might find the pearls themselves. That's my honest guess, anyhow. He always said that, if he had any money, he'd put it into jewels instead of bonds. If you care to follow him, I fancy you'll find him trafficking somewhere between Manila and New Guinea."

"But it's incredible!" I burst out.

"It's no more incredible than some of the people who went to Kimberley."

"Why do you defend him?" I really was curious.

"Defend him?" She turned on me. "If I told you in straight words what I think of him, you wouldn't consider me a decent woman! I'll never look on his

PEARLS

face again—unless,” she added, in a strange, speculative undertone, “he brings back a fortune for Corinna. For that, I’d almost take him back.” She had sat down—for weariness, I guessed—and now she stretched her arms straight before her on the table. Her hands, limp and empty, lay palms upward.

“And you think he may?”

Mrs. Parmenter did not stir. Still in that beaten and broken attitude she gazed ahead of her at the blank wall of the studio. It was a sunless day; the north light was very chill. Her lips moved.

“I must hope it’s why he’s gone—if I’m not to loathe myself all my life for having been the wife of such a creature.”

“Perhaps he has gone for a little respite—for a fresh idea. Perhaps he hopes to work.”

“Does a sculptor go to the South Seas to work? It wouldn’t have occurred to me. But Corinna and I, at least, will travel in the other direction. She shall have her chance.”

“You mean Europe?”

“Yes, I mean Europe.” She did not change her posture, but her voice grew stronger. “I’ll find some

PEARLS

cheaper place than this to live—and it shan't be a convent, either! My daughter is going to be seen, by people who won't take her loveliness so phlegmatically as you. There's nothing to pack. We'll go as soon as I get the money."

"You have that clear, at least?"

She looked at me with a bitter little smile. "He can pay the rent—out of his fourteen thousand. The landlord can take that thing"—she nodded, over her shoulder, at the statue under its damp cloth—"for security, if he likes. I shan't leave my address, but they're very welcome to find out my husband's, if they can."

Still I delayed my departure. "Have you anything besides the thousand?"

"I have the pitiful income on which we've all lived entirely during the last three years. You can believe it's not much."

"The cad!" I couldn't, at the moment, think of any excuse for Parmenter's carrying away his immoral fourteen thousand.

Grace Parmenter rose slowly. "I'm not a just woman," she said. "I've had nothing to make me so.

PEARLS

But if it will help you at all to know it, you are welcome to the fact that Pierce hates me."

"I don't believe it. And, anyhow, he doesn't hate Corinna."

"No; and that's where I score."

"How?"

She bent her lips to my ear, as if afraid of being overheard. "He doesn't know that the child's a beauty. He doesn't dream of her future. And now he has lost her forever. I have her; she's all mine."

"The woman's mad"—at last it went through my mind quite explicitly.

"No, I'm not," said Grace Parmenter.

"What?" I was startled.

"What you think—off my head. I have a notion Pierce is, though. The pearls did it."

Then she held out her hand. "Good-bye. Corinna won't come out to see you again in her poor little rags—not when you've seen her as she should be. And she'll be cold in there. I must fetch her."

She walked with me to the door. "I'm not a just woman," Grace Parmenter said again. "There are many things I won't tell you that perhaps, if there

PEARLS

were time, I ought; and a great many more that I couldn't tell you with all the time in the world. But you may take it from me that Pierce has gone for pearls."

"You mean money?"

"I mean pearls."

And she shut the door on me.

That is all I know about the Pierce Parmenters—all, I mean, that concerns the actual drama. A few fragments of mere chronicle have drifted in since I left the studio that afternoon, but for some years I've heard nothing. Mother and daughter did go to Europe; at least I suppose that is where they went. I was prevented, for a few days, from returning, and when I did get back there, they had flown, the janitor knew neither how nor whither. I received the amount of my loan to Parmenter in bills, by registered post from San Francisco. The telegram had mentioned that he was sailing from that port for Manila. I have never heard another word from any of them—and virtually nothing about them. They weren't intimately connected with any other

PEARLS

people that I knew, and no coincidence has, as yet, brought me news.

There must have been a great deal back of it all that I shall never know, for the thing makes no sense as it stands. What Pierce Parmenter may have said to his wife during the cheerless years, I don't know; nor what he may have said in the last crucial hours before he left, with Mrs. Barry Bettelheim's necklace, for Chicago. Grace Parmenter as good as told me there were things I ought, if I were to understand, to know. There may have been madness in his family; he may have hated his wife so that he couldn't face her again, and preferred any cowardice to doing his conjugal and paternal duty; he may even have discovered Corinna privately, before his wife did, and have counted, callously, on her finding a fortune in her face; he may simply have been temporarily obsessed by the necklace and have waked up, sane and infinitely shamed, on some exotic reef. There's a choice of solutions for you. I have been royally perplexed for many years, and have always, in the end, come back to Grace Parmenter's "He has gone for pearls," as to a sibyllic utterance. It's tantalizing

PEARLS

to the last degree, but it's all I have to go on. Somehow, I believe he *did* go for pearls. But it's nearly ten years since I've heard anything, and you can see why I've melted the stuff down.

There's no chance now of a Parmenter's turning up at my place; and there are so many more fetching things about than this old problem of Pierce Parmenter that I wonder I haven't cleared it out before. Perhaps the reason I haven't is that I have always had—though at increasing intervals—a poignant memory of Corinna Parmenter in the doorway of her bedroom, slowly unwinding the silver furs that had to go back to Benton. If Benton could have seen that pitiful gesture, he'd have given them to her!

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

IT is with some reluctance that I give to a public on whose sympathy a reporter of unvarnished facts can never count, the details that follow. I carry light cargoes for choice; and why I should have been drawn into the uncongenial epic of Rodney Teele, God only knows. But the thing happened—happened, alack! to my knowledge and witnessing eye; and I have been (even I, with my inveterate preference for comic opera) so struck by all it meant that I cannot refrain. I should call the episode Biblical in its large effectiveness, if I did not see in it refinements of weakness that the Hebrew Scriptures knew nothing of. Isaiah or Ezekiel would have smashed through the rotten spots in the fabric with a lean inspired fist; or lightning would have descended from an ever-prepared heaven. Besides, in those days, it could never have happened: America is not Palestine. There is our fatal modern softness in it;

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

in spite of a hardness that suits quite well with the Chronicles.

It is not to be expected, I suppose, that our children shall keep on learning human nature from Jezebel and Joseph, though the Old Testament is, to my thinking, as good a primer of sociology as *The Kallikak Family*. It is inevitable that they should learn it from people like Rodney Teele, who was a king of sorts, as thousands of stockholders know. The newspapers, in their easy way, used to compare him to Napoleon. But he was a Napoleon without a Josephine and without a Saint Helena. He will stand, however, as well as any conqueror of them all, to illustrate the sæcular way of things. There are always human passions at work, and an ineluctable Voice that interferes. We have lost and gained many things in the twentieth century; but irony remains.

Money is so much more important than anything else, nowadays, whether to governments or to individuals, that we must be forgiven for facing men like Rodney Teele with bated breath; for thinking that the personality which is moved by a brain like that is something out of the common sort. In the

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

vast perspectives of to-day, pirates look like sneak-thieves, and the Medicis like push-cart men. How we are to escape reverence for Rodney Teele and his like, I do not see. Certainly, though I have no more reason to be a snob than most men, I always felt his importance. Even when I had seen him pityingly through the strangest episode of his life, I still felt that this man was not quite as other men. Nothing is so romantic as democracy, which worships its kings wherever they happen to blaze forth. Strength is not yet old-fashioned; and our fists may prove that yet on the front teeth of Europe. There it is: all the primeval passions astir at the mere mention of Rodney Teele! I must get on with my story. It will not, if I can write the truth out calmly, leave you cold.

I knew Rodney Teele, Junior, at Saint Jude's, and later at Harvard. We had been good friends at school, where a gilded equality prevailed; and, though I could not afford at Harvard, as he did, to live on the Gold Coast, I saw a lot of him in that most democratic of universities. Rodney, of course, had no hereditary social pull that was recognized

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

on the banks of the Charles; but it would have been mediæval and ridiculous to leave a fabulous fortune like that out in the cold, when the fabulous fortune was also a good fellow. Rodney had not an ounce of vice in him; by which I do not mean that he was a weakling. He was a perpetually smouldering creature, agog for achievements of the moral order. It's a complicated business to be righteous in these days, when the devil is flinging so many paradoxes about. It took Rodney's father, in a premature skull-cap and surrounded with secretaries, to do that. Rodney, Junior, had somehow the simplicity of the soil: he was no more complicated than a crop of corn. The things that swayed him were blind, unphraseable forces. It would have taken the Department of Agriculture to analyze him. He was, for all practical purposes, merely a good fellow—but waiting, you could see, for his chance. Unless his chance came in extraordinarily lucky guise, he would probably mess it. That was the impression of our crowd. We liked Rodney all the better for not being a replica of his Machiavellian parent—whom we, as good Americans, knew all about. For my part, I thought Rodney

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

would be distinctly up against it when it came to sharing the management of the Teele millions. His allowance was enormous, but, after all, he wasn't supposed to do anything but spend it. He used to finance us all when we were hard up, which shows he was a good sort. If he hadn't been, he would have been the last man we could borrow from. No one, however, could have called Rodney Teele a financial genius: he was peculiarly the heir of all his ancestors who hadn't made good. My own Europeanized kin thought him dull, though they never failed to tell every one when he had been staying with us, or when I had spent a college holiday in the vast and gloomy New York mansion that his widowed father inhabited alone. Rodney belonged, as a matter of course, to his father's unfashionable religious sect; but he made cheques serve in lieu of more personal services. Rodney would never teach in the Sunday-school. That was emphatically *not* the chance he was waiting for. At that time, he was a bit of an agnostic.

Out of college, I naturally saw less of Rodney. I had just enough money to potter about and think

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

of being an architect, because that gave me a chance to go to Europe on fantastic pretexts of studying detail. I eventually became an architect, but I am not, even now, a very good one. Accordingly, my friends' prophecy of huge commissions from the Teeles for every sort of edifice, public and private, has never been fulfilled. It was my own fault, however, I am sure. Rodney Teele, Senior, approved of my companionship for his son. I have never known why, as my attitude to the decorations of the big Fifth Avenue house must have been insufferable. I was at the priggish age.

Rodney himself was too unhappy, I think, at the time, to want anything but sympathy. He did not like his job, which consisted in being introduced to the diplomacy of high finance. I don't think Rodney disapproved particularly of his father's methods, or cared which way the eternal controversies and litigations went. I am convinced it was not the muck-raking that made him wretched. He was simply incapable of understanding a vast financial policy; and that incapacity, considering what was expected of him, naturally made for his unhappiness.

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

He was like a child wrinkling its brows and trying to spell an elusive word—a child who knows that spelling is important. Rodney Teele's fortune would have been safe enough with his son; but he wanted more than that: he wanted to establish a dynasty of Teele. He wanted to leave a name that would terrify in itself; and he wanted his son to be a man, if possible, of more power than he. It was a mad thing to ask of the gods: to permit Rodney Teele to exist over again in his son, to let the lightning strike twice in that particular place. Certainly the gods showed no sign of permitting it. Rodney was loyal, but not to the point of genius.

Old Teele once did me the honor—as an intimate friend of Rodney's, and a quite unimportant, a virtually anonymous creature—of consulting me.

"The boy has stuff in him," he said quietly, with an interrogative lift of his left eyebrow. (You've seen it caught in snapshots.)

"Indeed, he has. But I suspect that it isn't that kind."

"He looks as if he would do something, sometime."

"He will. But no one except his guardian angel

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

knows what. When Rodney wants anything supremely, he'll get it. But until he does want something supremely, he will be perfectly ineffectual. He can't apply his hidden powers until an overmastering desire unseals them. That's my notion of it, sir."

Rodney Teele, Senior, pushed back his skull-cap and gazed at me, as non-committally as an idol.

"Perhaps you are right. We must find the key—we must find the key, with God's help."

It did not seem to me unnatural that he should speak of the Deity. A man like that must believe in something besides himself; there must be a discreet colleague somewhere, or the weight of the world would be too much. Napoleon had his star, and Rodney Teele had his own God, in whom he trusted—a God made vivid by a rococo taste in the essentials of salvation. His God was too much like a salaried confidant to suit me; but I have never doubted Rodney Teele's sincerity, or his capacity for mystical vision. The world knows only his charities; but once or twice I have perceived the Hebraic conviction that backed them. I have seen Rodney Teele at prayer.

So we were waiting, Rodney Teele and I, leaning

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

from our separated orbits, to see what would move young Rodney. It was nearly a year before we saw—nearly a year, at least, before I did; and, characteristically, I saw it in the morning paper. Young Rodney had married. God knows where he met the girl, or why she bowled him over. Artistically speaking, it was a *mésalliance* of the finest. She was not even notorious. I waited for some word from Rodney himself. None came; and after the first day the papers, one and all, were silent. I didn't know what sums went into silencing them; but there was not even the usual mention of a fruitless interview. They were dumb as fish. The great negotiations for the Labrador railway went on, and the Bolivian loan pursued its path. Rodney Teele was at the helm, and whether young Rodney was working incognito among the crew, or had been marooned on some coral island, no one knew, any more than I. I suffered honest pain, for I had been fond of Rodney; and for his father I had that dazzled and guilty respect which I fancy most citizens shared with me. I wrote to my friend, but I got no answer. I did not write to the elder Teele; from him, in the cir-

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

cumstances, I was as cut off as if I lived in Mars. In the world of loans and railways and foreign bourses, I was as nothing.

Once, hoping for a clue, I went to his unfamiliar church, and saw him, solitary in his prominent pew. There was no clue there, though I watched him all through a long sermon. He looked—if there has ever been such a thing—like a Chinese Jew: son of a mandarin and a princess of the house of David. Nothing else expresses the baffling quality of that parchment face in which, above the thin, vertically-drooping moustache and the high cheek-bones, black eyes burned. Fire and scroll alike were inscrutable. The ends of Asia seemed to have met in that countenance, fixed incongruously upon the optimistic preacher of an upstart creed. I took home a tremendous impression, but I no longer hoped for clues. Rodney was fair and stocky. . . . He would go under. For six months that conviction was all my sympathy had to feed upon.

Rodney Teele was not lost to my musings, however. It seemed incredible that he could drop out of sight like a kidnapped girl. Sometimes I hoped that

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

his father was financing him in the antipodes—Celebes, or Argentina; that somewhere, under another name, he was the lord of rolling acres and queer exotic comforts. Sometimes I feared that there had been a bitter quarrel, and that all young Rodney's latent force had gone into suppressing himself absolutely out of a world where his father's name was so much as known. In that case he would have to go far afield. It was very clear that, whatever had happened, Rodney was not trading on that name—not even to the extent of making the fortune of some reporter. Somebody's will-power, whether the father's or the son's, had created that sinister and abysmal silence. The case of Rodney Teele was not even a stock subject at clubs where men had known him—perhaps merely because the newspapers didn't keep him before the world. I imagine we are far more nose-led by the press than we will admit. The Teeles had never gone in for "society;" and young Rodney would never be missed by Wall Street so long as old Rodney was there. Sometimes it seemed to me that I was the only living creature who gave him a thought. "Very curious," said the one or two men I

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

spoke to; then shrugged their shoulders, and left it—as if, because old Rodney Teele was silent, it were bad form for any one else to wag his tongue. But I was not content; and I waited. I kept myself in a breathless state because—because I felt it shocking that some one should not be in a breathless state. And, because no one else was breathless, I came to consider that I had been the only person who had really cared about young Rodney. I don't defend my logic; but, at all events, that is the state of mind I achieved in the six months after Rodney's marriage.

It was six months or more after the lightning-flash in the papers—a lightning-flash which had been followed by no reverberation—that I went one evening, as carelessly as you like, to the telephone. The call was long—I remember rattling the receiver impatiently to stop it. The message I listened to came in the precise, chill tones of Luke Standish, old Rodney Teele's private secretary. He stated his name and his authority, then made a bland request that I would come to Mr. Teele's house that evening, if possible, for ten minutes' talk with the great man. It was less a request, really, than an appointment:

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

the voice mentioned an hour, and hardly waited for my acquiescence, which came, indeed, mechanically. It was a voice obviously not accustomed to discussion of previous engagements. It dropped the information—but not in the tone of apology—that Mr. Teele was sailing for Europe the next morning. Then I heard the click at the other end. “Hang you, I knew that!” I exclaimed, as I hung up the receiver. It was annoying to be told, after such a peremptory summons, something that every one with a penny to spend on a newspaper had known for a week. I felt as irritated as if I had been a competitor to be crushed; and the irritation lasted.

All irritation dropped, however, at half past eight that evening in Rodney Teele’s library, when I stood once more facing him. The great cavalcade of books swept round the vast room in serried order, except where they broke ranks over the fireplace to admit the famous Rembrandt. I had seen the room before, but never by lamplight. It had seemed to me senselessly luxurious—barring the Rembrandt—and I had turned up my nose at the collection, which ran to bindings rather than editions. Rodney

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

Teele was no connoisseur; and even the Rembrandt, as I knew, had been a mere curious accident of his career. I remembered distinctly my own earlier scorn; but now my scorn dropped with my irritation. Rodney Teele himself, slim and terrible, was a collector's piece that put even the Rembrandt to scorn. The dim Dissenting light of the church where I had last seen him had done him no justice, though it had given the hint of what I now saw focussed by the sixty-four-candle-power lamp. What mating had produced Rodney Teele, I wondered, as I stood before him. I remember thinking fantastically that *Who's Who* must have lied. By what Mendelian miracle could the simple Middle-Western pair who were his accredited progenitors have achieved this offspring?

The face that was bent towards mine was more Oriental than ever: the cheek-bones higher, the moustache thinner and grayer, the face more like old vellum—and the black eyes, by contrast, fiercer. "Inscrutable" is a cheap word to describe him with; there was no mystery there, in the crude sense, because there was no suggestion of anything to solve.

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

That face had everything to say—and nothing to tell. It showed the door to curiosity. Rodney Teele might have been meditating the Infinite in some high gorge of the Yalu since the Mings were overthrown. Only the eyes were like those we feel blazing upon us from the pages of the everlasting Chronicles. I thought how hideous it would be if I had come there to question him.

He did not offer me a cigar, though I saw the conventional box at hand. Rodney Teele did not smoke, himself, and he probably forgot it. I cannot say how unimportant I felt.

He began speaking at once—with a quite Occidental precision, in a soft, slightly nasal voice.

“I am leaving for Carlsbad to-morrow. My physicians insist upon it.”

I bowed.

“I think it a quite unnecessary precaution, but as I am not needed here for the moment, I judged it well to be tractable. Any means of adding to one’s strength after the age of sixty are desirable in themselves.”

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

"Of course." I spoke shortly, determined not to grovel. But my own voice, I noticed, was low.

"I remembered you as an intimate of my son's—an intimate whom, in former days, I was glad to welcome."

"I have always been very fond of Rodney."

"Yes—just so. And Rodney, I think, was fond of you—though I do not speak with authority of my son's feelings." He smiled.

"He certainly was." Some of the breathlessness of the months just past got into my voice at this point. To that I would stick, through thick and thin, nor care what the Power opposite me said.

"I felt inclined to ask you—I have not put the question to any one else—before leaving America for a rather long time, if you know where Rodney is. I quite understand that you may prefer not to answer."

"On the contrary, I prefer to answer, and with complete veracity. I know nothing whatever about Rodney except that I saw some months ago in a newspaper that he was married. I wrote to him here, but never had any reply."

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

"Yes. Your letter is probably among these." He took up a little pile of letters from the table, removed the elastic band that confined them, and held them out to me. "Would you care to extract it?"

The packet was not very large, and my own letter was quickly found. I fingered it, with the proprietary instinct one has towards old letters of one's own rediscovered in strange places or after many days. Then another impulse conquered that: the impulse not to stop my old message on its delayed and doubtless vain quest for Rodney Teele. No; if it ever reached him, so much the better. It would speak for itself more clearly than I could speak for it. I handed back the packet.

"I think I'll let it take its luck. There just might come a day when Rodney would be glad to find it."

"As you like." Rodney Teele replaced the elastic band and laid the bundle to one side. "But it is perhaps fair to tell you that I think there is less chance of its reaching Rodney here than in any other spot on earth."

I shrugged my shoulders. "Let it take its luck," I repeated. Then I grew bold. "Mr. Teele," I said,

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

“you leave me at liberty to infer that you did not approve of Rodney’s marriage. Surely you, and you alone—since you managed to choke off the newspapers—can tell best where Rodney is likely to be; for Rodney must have talked with you since he talked with any one else. No one, I feel perfectly sure, has seen or heard of Rodney since his marriage. I am convinced that, if any one had, it would have been I. And you knew enough at least to silence the press—otherwise, there would have been a dozen reports a day.”

He fingered a paper-cutter—not nervously, but methodically, as if with a purpose.

“If the newspapers have reported nothing, it is, so far as I know, because there has been nothing to report. I requested them to refrain from publishing anything that was not absolutely authentic. That, they were kind enough to do. If Rodney himself had chosen to fill a column a day, I could not, of course, have prevented it.” He smiled blandly.

I may have looked incredulous, for he went on. “I am speaking only the literal truth. Have the goodness not to doubt my word. It would have

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

satisfied a natural curiosity on my part if they had succeeded in getting at Rodney. But I am led to infer that he has the family dislike for informing the public about his private affairs."

The sense of his power ebbed from me a little, at that moment. It was inconceivable that any one could come close enough to old Rodney Teele to give him a strangle-hold. He was incalculably remote. I, at all events, was very far away from him—quite out of his perspective, too small to focus. If I had been something within his ken—a corporation, for example—I should doubtless not have ventured. But it really could not matter to Rodney Teele what went on in the insect world.

"I am very sorry that I cannot give you any information about Rodney. If I had any—unless Rodney had forbidden it—it would have been yours unreservedly. Would you mind my appealing to you in turn? Did anything pass between you and your son that could give an old friend—me, to be explicit—a clue to go on? I would do a good deal to get in touch with him. I would make sacrifices. Did he drop nothing when he had his interview with you?"

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

Rodney Teele's left eyebrow, as he answered, had its peculiar interrogative lift—that lift which so seldom accompanied a real question. “I had no interview with my son. None was needed.”

“You mean——?”

For the first time, he spoke sharply, and departed from the stilted articulation of the self-made man. “When the young fool decided to throw his life away, he wasn't fool enough to ask me if I approved! Even young Rod had sense enough for that. No, sir: we needed no interview! He wrote me a letter saying what he was going to do; and then he had enough remnants of decency to get out. I've heard nothing of him since.” He shut his lips close, and returned to his delicate operations with the paper-cutter. I was left staring.

“Then young Rod never even asked you what you felt about it?”

“My son knew what I should feel.” He had returned to his precise manner. “For a long time he has been perfectly aware of my principles on the subject of marriage. He has known that under no conditions would I sanction his taking a wife who

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

was not eminently fit to bear the next generation of Teeles. Wealth I should not necessarily have asked for; but a stock worth crossing with my own I think I had a right to expect. I am by nature, perhaps, something of an aristocrat in these matters, Mr. Souther. I do not believe in taking wives among the Midianitish women. And—I say it with due humility—the son of Rodney Teele had no ordinary responsibilities.”

Useless to come into that court with a tale of human passion! It had always seemed to me—though I knew nothing about it—that between father and son there would be a deep instinctive sympathy in these matters: that a man could hardly be unmoved by the fresh desire engendered of his own desire—however deep beneath the ashes his own desire might have come to lie. But Rodney Teele hardly seemed, even reminiscently, the human male. He had the most celibate face I have ever seen. A strange person to be prating of the great human business^t of pedigrees!

“The girl may be as good as gold,” I muttered.

“She may.” He conceded it with no air of con-

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

cession. "But I am justified in supposing that if my son had honestly believed her, on all reasonable grounds, acceptable to me as a daughter-in-law, he would have intimated as much. He made no attempt to defend his action to me. The Teeles are good pioneer American stock. I have been blessed with success beyond that of most men of my generation, but I should not have asked my son to marry any one of better birth than himself—if better birth, from a sane American standpoint, there can be. The importance of heredity is being so completely demonstrated at the present day by the men of science, that I should have considered it a gross dereliction of my duty as a father and a steward of God's wealth, had I wanted less. My son knew my views on the subject, and, if he had met them in choosing a wife, he would have told me so. He had no reason, in that case, to expect opposition from me. He was my only child, and he had never found me niggardly with affection or with money."

"He is proud, young Rodney," I mused.

"Too proud—and yet not quite proud enough, I am afraid," his father affirmed, with mild precision.

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

"And now, I do not think I need keep you longer, Mr. Souther. I thank you for coming. I am sure you understand a father's natural curiosity." He rose.

"Have you any message for Rodney, if I should run across him in your absence?"

He settled his eye-glass on his fine nose and looked at me interrogatively.

"Any message? Certainly not. If I had felt it imperative to communicate with my son, I could have employed people to trace him. I assure you that I respect his evident desire for privacy. And I trust you will not think it necessary to inform any one of my inquiries. In fact"—he looked me over from head to foot—"if you have any doubts on that point, I should be glad if you would indicate to me an adequate way of silencing them."

I was hot. "There are some things that are not bought and sold, Mr. Teele," I declared. "Among them are confidences between gentlemen."

There was the hint of a smile on his stiff, smooth features. "I was not referring to money," he answered.

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

I could not contradict him, though I still felt that my impulse of anger had been justified.

"It is very difficult to know, in personal matters, just what another man may consider to be his duty," he continued. I could not gainsay such a platitude, and judged it better to say nothing. The interview was obviously at an end; and for nothing in the world would I consciously prolong it. I moved to the door, while Rodney Teele rang for a servant to show me out. We had not shaken hands.

He was still holding the enamelled bell-handle, when a footman entered. Under his perfectly adequate mask, I thought the man surprisingly pale. He ignored me, and handed, very respectfully, a card to Mr. Teele. I waited impatiently for the chance to say a definite "Good-evening" to my host. When I heard no order given, no sound made, I finally turned my head.

Rodney Teele was standing near the great table, but erect, quite independent of the support it offered. His eyes were bent on the card, and, from every tense and narrowed feature, I could see that he was considering a plan of action and did not mean to

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

speaking prematurely. I was uncomfortable—Rodney Teele in the act of decision was, even to an outsider, an impressive figure. I felt, besides, as if I were looking through a keyhole; such intensity, impenetrable though it was, he must usually have reserved, instinctively, for moments of solitude. I wanted desperately to run; yet I did not want to break in upon that tremendous concentration by definitely leaving the room.

He spoke, in a moment, with chill sharpness—still looking at the card. He did not even glance at the servant.

“How does it happen that a card like this is brought to me? Flodden knows perfectly well that I never see any one except by appointment.”

The man was nervous, I could see, and I turned to gaze at the Rembrandt. But though I could be blind, I could not be deaf, to what passed.

“Flodden is out, sir, and Dempsey at the door is new, and Mr. Standish has left for the night, and Dempsey didn’t quite venture, sir, he said, to—” The voice died away in a genuine stammer. Clearly, there had been magic in the card.

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

"I see that I am served by a pack of fools." The voice was very quiet; quiet enough to match the impassive pagan face that got so vividly (stare as I would at the masterpiece) between me and the Rembrandt.

Then I heard a sharp intake of the breath. "Mr. Souther!" I faced about. The master's back was turned, now, to the servant, and the man was surreptitiously drawing the back of his hand across his forehead. I saw the gesture vaguely over his master's shoulder.

I hurried forward. "I am sorry to have been an interruption. Good-night, Mr. Teele." I wanted, unlimitedly, to dissociate myself, once and for all, from Rodney Teele's affairs.

"Wait!" He lifted a peremptory finger. Apparently his decision was taken, and I saw at once, to my extreme disgust, that he had involved me in it. No one, it seemed to me, could ever have wanted to be with Rodney Teele more than half an hour. Humanly speaking, it was a strain. And he had not even offered me a cigar—damn his dictatorial eyes! So, confusedly, reflected the sensitive young cub that I was then.

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

He looked at me keenly—his purpose, I was sure, perfectly formed. “Will you be so good as to be present at an interview I have just decided to grant to this person? I should be glad of a witness, and my secretary is spending the night with his mother before sailing with me to-morrow.”

I looked at the card, held negligently under my nose by Rodney Teele’s strong hand. “Mr. Rodney Teele, Jr.,” was engraved on it. Only the “Mr.” was crossed out in pencil, and “Mrs.” written in above.

Every instinct in me cried out “No!” If there has to be a fight, I like a sporting proposition, and the handicap against the woman—whatever she was—was too great. I don’t think there was one atom of curiosity in me concerning the event that was about to take place; curiosity is of comedy, and this was not comedy. But to stay seemed to be, in default of real knowledge, my best guess at the way to back young Rodney. “I’ll stay,” I said at last, rather thickly.

“Thank you.” Then he turned to the man. “You may show her up here. Is she alone?”

“Yes, sir.”

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

“Bring her up at once.” He tore the card carefully in two and dropped it into the waste-basket. To me, in the few minutes that went to the servant’s descending and conveying his charge back to the library, he said nothing. We waited in silence, each staring at whatever spot on the book-lined wall was most convenient. I stole one look at him. His narrowed eyes seemed to slant slightly upward at the corners, and his thin gray moustache had precisely the vertical droop of a high Chinese official’s. He was more than ever like a mandarin with whom one can exchange only Ollendorffian ideas, germane to the philosophy of neither.

At last we heard steps, and both of us, with a common impulse, faced the door. We must have looked like allies at bay. The footman did not announce the visitor in the usual way. He said only, “Here she is, sir!” and fled, decorously but definitely—hot-foot, no doubt, for the servants’ hall. I moved over and closed the great mahogany door. Rodney Teele had given me no sign, but in some way his wishes had been communicated to me. Unless you gave yourself time to think, you would always,

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

I fancy, have taken orders from Rodney Teele. I was annoyed, the instant I had done it: I was no lackey to forestall his desires. Then I came back to the situation.

There was no formal introduction. Rodney Teele mentioned my name to his son's wife—absently, I should say, except that he never gave the impression of doing anything absently. He motioned her to a chair—almost imperceptibly—but she paid no attention to the gesture. He sat down, himself, then, in his own desk-chair, and faced the two of us who stood on the other side of the table. Young Mrs. Teele had not even looked at me when my name was spoken; she had merely shrugged one shoulder slightly in my direction, as if the name of a minor annoyance like me did not matter. Treated so cavalierly, I found myself at liberty to be curious. Rodney Teele sat erect, as if in the judgment-seat—his yellow-white face, with the light full on it, emerging from vague, vast backgrounds of shadow. The woman, ignoring me utterly, stood facing him. For the moment I was free.

I knew, in an instant, that I should never under-

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

stand why Rodney Teele, against such odds, had chosen her. "This is what it took to move young Rodney; *this* was his chance," my brain said with slow irony. In profile, under an ugly hat, her face did not, of course, have fair play; but, even so, it was not the profile of a beauty. Her figure was good, as most young American figures are good; but there was nothing extraordinary in posture, line, or carriage. Her eyes I could not see. More than ever, it seemed a mad adventure of young Rod's—and not so much mad, even, as outrageously unnecessary. But of course I did not know—never should know—what had flung them together, or what blinding magic there had been in circumstance. Sometimes a man loves a woman for the place or the hour he has found her in. I was hideously uncomfortable—I had expected that she would have beauty, at least, to back her. Something in me said: "Make the most of your bad moment; analyze this miracle, if you can." But, most emphatically, I could not.

All this was a matter of only a few seconds to my quickened senses, my eager, tiptoe mind. Then I heard her speaking.

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

"I wasn't sure you'd see me. But I saw you were going to Europe to-morrow, and I risked everything."

The balances of judgment that I considered I was holding swayed perceptibly. The voice was good—perhaps a shade too powerful, too full of emotional possibilities, for our conventional code, but undeniably an asset. Still: to throw away that chance in life, for a voice—especially when it gave no positive guarantee of being the voice of a lady . . . Her English, as you will see, was well enough; but her intonations were not those of the privileged. I may as well record that fact now.

"It was a sudden decision to see you. My first, perhaps I should say my better, judgment suggested that I should most emphatically refuse. I hope you will justify my decision by being brief. What is your business with me?"

"I am Rodney's wife."

"That does not constitute business with me."

"My husband is your son, then."

"Did he send you to me?"

"He did not. He is as proud as the devil."

Rodney Teele's left eyebrow mounted. He did not

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

look at me, but I felt, none the less, his dry triumph at seeing me find her taste questionable.

"Then certainly you have no business with me. Suppose we terminate this quite useless interview now." There was a slight emphasis on the last word.

"I thought you ought to know that your son is not well and is very poor."

"If he is poor, it is his own deliberate choice that has made him so. He had a good salary when he was in my employ. I need not speak of what his prospects were, for I dare say you considered them before you married him."

"I considered nothing."

"Then you were very foolish. I am quite sure that my son did not lure you into marrying him with promises of wealth. He, at least, has never suggested that I should turn my stewardship to uses that I do not approve of. I think you are courageous—to use a mild word—to ask me for money when my son feels it impossible to do so himself. I think you are not very proud to beg when my son will not beg."

"I am too proud to beg of any one but you. I am much too proud to beg of you for myself."

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

"Are you suggesting that you would take a price for freeing him? Let me say at once that I believe the marriage-tie to be a thing instituted of God. Since my son has chosen you, if you are faithful to him, I should consider him as much disgraced by divorce as he was by his marriage."

The ivory-white features stirred only so much as speech necessitated. All the time his narrowed eyes searched her face. She was very game, at least.

"Even you couldn't part us." Her voice sank to a thrillingly harsh note. "And I tell you I am not asking for myself. I can go the hospital when my time comes." There was the faintest contraction of Rodney Teele's thin lips; but his face remained impenetrable as ever. "All I ask of you is to keep Rodney going till he can get a start. He had no money when he married me except what was in his pocket. He's got no fortune of his own, as you very well know, and I guess he always lived up to that magnificent salary you tell about. And, cast off as he is, he'll never go to any of his friends for help. What do you suppose Rodney Teele, Junior, can do in New York with you and his own pride both against him? You

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

didn't train him to work with his hands, did you? He's taken what he could get, but it'll kill him in time. Do you think your only son is such a poor proposition that you can't put a little of your money into him—even if he didn't marry the girl you picked out for him? You can send him out West. Suppose you don't like me: he's your son, isn't he? And his child will be your grandchild, no matter who his mother is."

She stopped, and, putting her hands on the table, leaned forward across it. "You can't get away from that!"

Things were going very badly. I wished myself away, so helpless I felt. But her voice—the rich and complex organ that she could command—was a miracle. I wondered if it could have been the voice. . . .

Rodney Teele brought his hand down on the table. The gesture was very quiet, but I felt that, metaphorically speaking, the imperial thumb had been turned down.

"Two facts should, I think, be called to your attention, madam. One is that I can respond to no appeals made to me by any other person than my

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

son himself. The other is that your child is of no importance to me." Again the slight emphasis—this time on "your."

I have never, before or since, had to stand by and listen to the speaking of such brutal things; yet Rodney Teele, saying them in his soft, slightly nasal voice, did not sound so brutal as he is written down. The complete detachment of his tone saved him—perhaps her—to some extent. He might have been a consulted oracle, giving forth discouraging information about Rodney Teele, Senior. Even so, I could not blame her for flashing back her answer at him with some shrillness. She had caught his emphasis on the pronoun.

"My child? And why not my child? I was an honest girl when your son married me. I am an honest woman now. I simply tell you your Christian duty. I am no Christian myself; but I don't believe they'd stand for your kind of charity."

Rodney Teele took up his paper-cutter and held it lightly between the middle fingers of his two hands.

"I am not accusing you of not being 'honest,' as you use the word. What I mean is this, woman! The

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

Teeles breed for virtues they have proved. They breed from a stock they can count on. If God has given me power in the land, the less reason why I should pass it on to people who are not my people nor their God my God. I have nothing against you; but you were not the wife for a Teele, or the mother for Teeles. My son told me of his marriage the day it was accomplished. He told me who you were and whence you came. If he had had any effective arguments to reconcile me to it, he would have produced them then. If he had felt that circumstances were now such as to justify his approaching me, he would have approached me himself. I trust far more to my son's conscience than to yours. I do not say how I should meet any approach from him; but, in any case, I meet none that is not entirely his own. My son is silent; and certainly while he is silent you babble in vain. As for my fortune, rather than hand it down to generations that I can never be sure of, it shall go back to God." There was no passion in his tone—only a great gravity that harshened his soft voice slightly.

The woman turned away from him, and for the

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

first time—though even then she did not look at me—I saw her full face. Her language had been that of the native-born—no trace of foreign accent. But the voice ran through a gamut of emotion that the pure American stock does not easily come by. And when I saw her face clearly, for a few seconds, under the lamplight, I found in it, too, something haunting and foreign—something like the mingled crudity and suggestiveness of a folk-song. I had no time to follow the clue, passionately concerned though I was to discover why she had so moved young Rodney. She turned back, while I was still discreetly searching her face, to Rodney Teele.

“You talk of God—you? God is supposed to be good, isn’t he? Why, there isn’t a man, woman, or child in the whole country that doesn’t know how you got rich, and despise you for it!” Her voice was the very poetry of scorn. She was lyric, while old Rodney was detached; and escaped her own brutality as he did his. He did not seem revengeful, or she brazen. Painful, ugly, as the scene had been, even I, the witness, did not feel besmirched. She had strength, that girl, if she had no other virtue on

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

earth. I could not honestly call her dark impressiveness beauty, or mistake her self-possession for breeding; but she was not simply a common creature.

Then I heard her take her farewell of Rodney Teele. "I don't know what you mean by the glorious Teele stock. If your son's child has an honest, healthy mother, I don't see why the Lord you seem to know so much about should ask for more. But I can't talk Scripture, I'm thankful to say! It's for me to worry, I guess, when my child will have a grandfather like you."

She moved to the door. Rodney Teele rose, and rang the bell for the man to re-conduct her. He did not answer her, or bid her good-evening. Apparently neither would carry irony to the point of a conventional parting. As I heard the servant's footsteps approaching, I spoke to her. "Will you give my love to Rodney?" She just glanced at me, and shrugged her shoulders, as if I had merely made some kind of inarticulate noise. She did not pretend to reply. Without one backward glance, she left the room; and the man closed the door behind them.

While their footsteps grew fainter, I had a mo-

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

ment of acute meditation, my eyes fixed on the ground. When I looked up, Rodney Teele was standing at the far end of the room by a window, his back turned to me. If I had been perplexed as to how to get out of that terrible library a quarter of an hour before, I was perplexed now tenfold. But before I could think how to say, "Good-night," I saw that I was to be spared the trouble of saying it at all. Rodney Teele was not thinking of me; doubtless he believed that I had gone. One arm flung out horizontally, he was speaking to himself. I moved softly to the door. The words came clearly from that distant figure, its oblivious back turned to me. "But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Then he dropped to his knees and was silent. In two minutes I was breasting the cool evening wind of the upper Avenue. I had encountered no servants, and had let myself out.

Young Rodney Teele died of pneumonia while his father was in Carlsbad. There was only the stark notice of the death in the papers—no hint of an address, no mention of the funeral: "Died, on ———, in New York City, of pneumonia, Rodney Teele, Jr."

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

I got just that and no more from our loquacious press; and it crossed my mind that the widow had shown herself almost a Teele by refusing—as she must have done—to be interviewed. Rodney Teele, on the other side of the ocean, was equally taciturn. Now and then, in the months after he had returned, I heard a man say furtively that old Rodney looked done up. But as he had no social existence, most reports of the sort came from Wall Street; and his untempered despotism in the world of high finance robbed those chance hints of their significance. He was more colossal, more hated, and more fawned on than he had ever been. The Lord, as he would surely have said, continued to bless his efforts. At the same time, his charities became more overwhelming, more cosmic than ever. He was the acknowledged treasury for promoters of all the most up-to-date and scientific reforms—the modern softness again, eating through the patriarchal fibre. He grew also more passionately religious, after his own queer kind. He seemed to me more than ever (for I occasionally saw him in his own house) to be in perpetual connection, by long-distance telephone, with his Maker. I do not speak

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

flippantly; it is many years since there has been flippancy in any one of my many attitudes to Rodney Teele. I am merely trying to express the curious alliance in his manner between the mystical Dissenter and the financier sitting at the heart of an impressive modern machinery. Meanwhile the eugenists, the social reformers, the settlement-workers, the chosen missionary societies were gorged, and wiped the fatness of his wealth from their lips. Suffragists, I believe, were always turned away before they got within the outer fringe of secretaries. He had hated one woman too much.

I say that I saw Rodney Teele occasionally. He sent for me now and then, and I dined with him alone in that empty house—singularly empty, because it seemed to have no hope, no future. We were, he and I and the servants, like the dwindling population of a citadel: safe while we lasted, but never to be reinforced or rescued. It was depressing; and yet I felt that I owed it to him to sit opposite him, once every six months or so, and eat his imperial fare to the accompaniment of melancholy thoughts. We never discussed the scene of which I had been a wit-

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

ness; we never mentioned his dead son. If Rodney had been living, I could not have gone there; but I had the sense, if not of serving young Rodney, at least of doing him no disservice. Whether Rodney Teele had ever had further communication with his daughter-in-law, I, of course, did not know. Nothing was ever heard of her—which might cut in either direction. That I was tacitly on the side of young Rodney and whatever belonged to him I am sure the old man knew; but he did not resent it. I sometimes wondered if that were not his only reason for keeping hold of me. I never quite believed that, however. I think his impulse was, rather, not to lose sight of an individual who possessed intimate information of the sort that I had packed away. I should have been quite willing to tell old Rodney the truth: that I had sought—and sought fruitlessly—for young Rodney's widow, as I had sought for Rodney himself before his death. Their obscurity was one of the cleverest and most difficult things I have ever known fate, assisted or unassisted, to achieve. I fancied they had been lost in some outlying slum or suburb, perhaps under another name. In any case, I knew less than

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

nothing. If Rodney Teele knew anything, he kept it to himself.

The pretext for his occasional invitations—there was always a pretext, as if to guard against my assuming that far-off event to be fresh in his memory—was usually architectural discussion. I was beginning to work hard, but I was near enough to the bottom for it to be out of the question that Rodney Teele should consult me professionally. He liked to talk about the plans of the various buildings that he endowed—informally, as he would have talked to a friend. I do not think he ever asked me a technical question, or in any sense gave away his own architects. But we discussed the exteriors of hospitals and settlements and missionary offices—all that generation of edifices brought into being by Rodney Teele's wealth during the last years of his life. On one occasion he asked me to go with him while he inspected a newly opened and most scientific orphanage. He used to walk quietly in, of an afternoon, to some institution he had backed, chat mildly with the authorities, do a little casual inspecting with the air of a sight-seer, and walk out again—keeping, all the

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

time, his thoughts to himself. Such visits were duly recorded in the press, of course; but they were externally as little as possible like an official progress. I was sometimes his sole body-guard, and I know.

“The orphanage?” I answered, in reply to his suggestion. “Oh, yes, I should like to see it. But I wonder, sir, that orphans should be in your line.”

The allusion was not so sharp as it sounds, for we had often discussed scientific philanthropy, and I knew some of his curious views.

“We must remember,” said Rodney Teele in his soft voice, fainter and slightly more nasal than of old, “that the laws of heredity are becoming fixed for us. We know that a certain proportion of the offspring, even with a bad strain in one of the parents, can be saved. The charter of the asylum provides that they can receive no children both of whose parents are undesirable. The eugenic specialists are finding the institution a fruitful field for research. I may say that it will be a great help to the proper testing of the Mendelian law for human subjects.” He smoothed his glove as we passed down the steps

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

of his grim mansion. "And I have a great deal of money," he added irrelevantly.

No one, so far as I know, has ever seen Rodney Teele in what could be called a "human" mood. He was not as other men; and his geniality was no more deceiving than the mask the Chinese actor puts on in sight of the audience. More than ever, that afternoon, as we rolled through the crowded streets in the barricaded hush of his limousine, I felt the isolation of this man. I wondered privately if he kept his amenities, like his confidences, for God. Not the greatest expert of them all had ever been introduced, I believe, to Rodney Teele's philosophy of life; and to no one, I judged, had he disclosed the complete design of his philanthropy. They were all blind beneficiaries. I, certainly, was as bewildered as any one; only I got no pleasure out of the contemplation of Rodney Teele. It did not flatter any secret democratic taint in me to see him walk up the steps of the main building of the asylum just as another man would have done. Yet I could not refuse him the little things he asked me.

This afternoon the superintendent was absent. It

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

was hard on the superintendent, I thought privately. He would so have liked that brief chat in his own office with the great man—that nervous chat in which nothing sincere or significant could possibly be brought out. An assistant proffered the card-catalogue as an object of interest; but Rodney Teele waved him away.

“I should like to see some of the children—if they are not in school.”

The head matron was summoned. For the little ones, it was the hour of recreation before supper. So we walked towards the scientific playground where earnest young women taught the little creatures the scientific way to play. The place was as clean as a hospital; elaborately subdivided, an intricate, bare labyrinth of the most modern description. I was not uninterested in the plans of the vast place; but it was only one of a thousand details in Rodney Teele’s past, and he pushed on towards the playground, barely nodding at the matron’s occasional outburst of rapture over arrangements for sanitation or comfort.

Presently we faced a crowd of fifty little creatures

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

in a broad, sanded enclosure. The two young play-assistants scanned our group of three, whispered to each other, and went on ostentatiously guiding the games. The children seemed to be fearless, which comforted me. I do not like orphan asylums. They ran up, by twos and threes, to inspect us and smile at the head matron. They were always herded back into their games with elaborate gentleness by the play-assistants.

Rodney Teele stood on the lowest of the steps that led down into the playground, and folded his hands on his stick. He stared for a moment non-committally before him, over the heads of the children—a parti-colored group. It was one of the new departures of this gilded institution that the children were not dressed alike. A little boy of three or four ran up to the matron to show her a toy pail. I should not have noticed the child except for the sudden flush that came over the woman's homely and dignified face. She beckoned one of the young women, whispered to her, and gave the boy into her charge, pointing to a distant sand-pile.

Just then Rodney Teele turned and saw the group.

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

Perhaps he thought it time for another manipulation of the mask. At all events, he asked a question. "What is this little boy's name?"

The play-assistant answered promptly: "Teddy, sir. Come, Teddy, don't bother the gentleman." And she was for hastening him off.

But the child clung for a moment to the voluminous gray skirts of the matron and spoke shrilly.

"It isn't! It's Rodney Teele, Third. My mother told me so."

The matron rocked nervously where she stood. "It's 'known as Teddy Rouse' in the card-catalogue, sir." Her face had turned from red to pale. "But he was two years old when his mother died: we don't know what crazy things she may have said to him. Their parents come near being the ruin of us if they live too long. 'Teddy Rouse' it is, and Mrs. Rouse, they say she was called. She must have had her marriage certificate, or he wouldn't have been admitted. These things are all done perfectly right at the Home, as the superintendent could tell you if he was here. Teddy, go and play with Miss Bamberg."

And the child went, but not before I had had one

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

sufficient look at him. The resemblance to young Rodney's wife was unmistakable: he had the same features, stamped, too, with the haunting, foreign look I had noticed that evening in old Rodney Teele's library. "Recessive to the dominant Teeles," I muttered to myself. Certainly, the child had no look of my classmate, and still less of the mandarin in ivory who stood at this moment beside me.

Rodney Teele said nothing. He raised his hand to check the flow of the matron's apology: she stopped in the middle of a word. He did not glance after the retreating child; but I knew he had seen as well as I. If ten seconds had sufficed to me, they would have been more than enough for Rodney Teele. He turned his back on the playground and strode stiffly into the building. The superintendent had not returned when we reached the office, and we waited there only five minutes, while Mr. Teele talked with the assistant about some new Montessori outfits. The matron hovered limply in the background, and followed us to the door. Not a word was spoken about Teddy Rouse.

I need not have dreaded the drive home. It was

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

my fate to enter into Rodney Teele's life at strange and crucial moments, and to emerge from them with no increased sense of fellowship with him. He always ignored immediately what we had just been through together, and the only proof I had of his remembering those hours was that he did not quite forget my existence. On this occasion, as well, no reference was made to the child we had seen. The only difference it had made was to bring to Rodney Teele's face the least perfunctory smile I had ever seen there—the smile of a man who has justified his ways. Without a lead from him, I could say nothing; and we drove home uncommunicatively, except for that speaking smile. He dropped me, courteously, at my own club, and went on. Through the window of the limousine, as the car turned, I could see his extraordinary face still mildly glowing. He never sent for me, after that, and I never saw him again.

It was a year after our visit to the orphan asylum that Rodney Teele died. His will was published in the papers, to the last inch of its great length. That stupendous storm of bequests broke over a stunned world, excluding for a day every other excitement.

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

There was so much money! Even Rodney Teele must have had hard work to dispose of it; but he had evidently toiled gallantly at his herculean task. He had at least kept his account with his Maker on an imperial scale. Again I was haunted by a sense of partnership—as if Rodney Teele had been the terrestrial member of the firm. But I kept my cynical reflections to myself. The date of the will lay somewhere between young Rodney's marriage and the journey to Carlsbad, though there were plenty of charitable codicils since that date. Some of his financial associates were remembered, as well as outlying Teeles in obscure corners of the country. The usual things were done for servants. There was no mention of Teddy Rouse.

I peered into the future, wondering vaguely if I should ever be in a position to do anything for little Rodney Teele, Third. I hoped I should. But at the moment I could not afford to remove him from the institution where he was; and a brief interview with Rodney Teele's lawyer showed me that, in the circumstances, Rodney Teele's will could not be assailed for the child's benefit. There had been a

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

sealed letter to his lawyers especially providing for that remote contingency. Rodney Teele had evidently not trusted me. I could only hold on and hope that sometime I might quietly take the boy away and look after him. It would not be a work of love—he did not look like Rodney; he looked only like all the things that had done for Rodney—but it might lay a few ghosts that seemed sometimes, to my forewarned ears, to be still treading the world.

The day never came, however. I used to visit the asylum occasionally, as a kind of carking duty. Always, in my mind, was the firm intention to withdraw Teddy Rouse as soon as my income should reach a certain figure, which I had fixed. At present Rodney Teele's grandchild was faring better on his casual crumb of Teele benevolence than I could guarantee his faring. It was some satisfaction to me to know, at least, that Teddy Rouse would, for a time, have been supported by his grandfather. Until I could do better, there was nothing for it but to go occasionally and carry him permitted gifts. I don't think the child ever grew fond of me—probably he

THE DOMINANT STRAIN

never really had the chance. I hadn't much to say to him—then.

A few years after Rodney Teele's death, when I paid one of my periodic visits to the orphanage, I was informed that Teddy Rouse had run away. No trace of the boy was ever discovered: his evasion had been planned with a skill worthy of the Teeles. It is possible that, one of these days, we shall do homage to some financial genius of undivulged origin, whose countenance an old man may quietly recognize. It may be that, meanwhile, the Teele brain is working somewhere in obscurity behind a face like a folk-song. But I doubt it. I think that little Teddy Rouse was a pure recessive, and that with his parents' untimely death the dominant strain was lost forever.

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

WHEN Rhoda Glave came down into the library, she found that her husband had gone out. It seemed odd, until she remembered that Haysthorpe, their guest, had an inordinate appetite for midnight air. Evidently he had persuaded Roland to join him, and they would be strolling, Heaven knew how far, in the dusk and chill of the deserted, elm-shaded streets. Mrs. Glave gathered her pale draperies about her with a little disgusted gesture, as if to leave the room that had disappointed her. The smooth silk, worn to limpness, still at its latter end hung gracefully. Rhoda Glave always wore a dress forever, until it seemed to be a kind of uniform. Once in five years, when she appeared in something new, you felt as if the leopard had changed his spots. Then you got used to her in that—*e da capo*.

Roland Glave's library, in which his wife now

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

stood, was in its quality not unlike his wife's dress. It looked much worn, used to the last shred; but in the composition of its elements a high standard had prevailed. Evidently the Glaves couldn't put up with bad things; they would go without, or they would wear their possessions to bits, but they wouldn't compromise beyond the bounds of decency. Nothing was patched, but everything was very, very thin. A similar record was written on Rhoda Glave's face for any one to read—all in noble phrases of resignation and mirth. She had had her day—like the frock, like the room—but she had lasted better. The play of her features was not over. Her chestnut hair sprang vividly up from her forehead; the hand that held her short silken train was firm and white. She held her head high—would always hold it high, one would have surmised. She had the look of a woman who has prepaid the importunate piper.

Rhoda Glave's gesture of disgust was only incipient. She let her soft, shabby draperies fall, and stood for an instant before a faded chair into which presently she sank. Her firm fingers rested on a book,

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

but she did not take it up. Instead, she arranged herself slowly in a comfortable position, then clasped her hands behind her head and stared before her into the half-dead fire. Relaxed, but poised—a typical attitude—she began to think. . . .

Good old Haysthorpe! He had been a classmate of Roland's, and his half-melancholy, half-cynical presence, his slight limp, his comfortable, safe income which he had never tried to increase, though with his relations it would have been so easy, had been familiar facts of all her married life. He had loyally taken her over, as she had loyally taken him. He wasn't there very often—he was usually wandering about the earth—but whenever he was, she found him welcome. Veils dropped away when he came. Oh, she *liked* Haysthorpe. He gave them both the re-quickened sense of their own brilliant beginning. Whatever else he was cynical about, he was never cynical about them. He took their romance delicately for granted; and admitted that, peerless though Roland might be among men, he had been well mated in his bride. Oh, for Haysthorpe, Rhoda reflected, they might have been a constellation! It

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

was something to be fixed for one pair of eyes in the vivid firmament. Yes, Haysthorpe had been wonderful; and he might walk Roland as far as he liked—she would not complain; though this wife of fifteen years' standing, the mother of four children, still found no use for her fine eyes comparable with that of resting on her husband's face. She didn't grudge anything to Haysthorpe, but it wasn't to be expected that she should prefer having her rare late-evening moments bereft of their luminary. She wanted Roland in—she always wanted him in. A roof existed, to her mind, to shelter him, and a roof not thus occupied hadn't much dignity. By the way, the actual roof of the kitchen had leaked in yesterday's rain—they must see the plumber. Rhoda smiled to herself at the imagery life imposed. Plumbers and constellations!

Why didn't they come back? This prolonged stroll—slow, of course, to humor Haysthorpe's limp—was like the old, lavish days before the children came, when time, if it was money, was at least golden and not mere slippery change. Roland had been pot-boiling even then, but boiling the pot wasn't so bad

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

if only you didn't have to boil it all the time—and stir, stir, stir, as it boiled, until your arm ached. Of course, Roland hadn't it in him to do anything without a *cachet* of its own; but the fact remained that he reviewed other men's books, passed judgment on other men's policies, worked at other men's behests for whatever they decided to give him. His reputation was, in its way, unique; but he had never had time to stamp his impression home on the world at large—the world that pays. He was a genius, poor darling, but a genius-of-all-work. The thing he did best was the thing for which he got no pay at all: he talked superlatively.

After college Roland Glave had flung all his tiny inheritance into a traveller's purse, and had gone round the world. He had gone with modern speed and comfort; yet he seemed to have swung out to the horizon in a glorious galleon, to have searched the seas to the sound of music, and to have brought home rich argosies of anecdote and fable. Rhoda remembered the vivid months after his return, when they had fallen in love with each other. His talk was in the grand manner, *voilà tout*; and if he was as

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

poor as he was adored, what did it matter? There was no fatal fleck of egotism on his brilliance. He had done whatever dignified, ill-paying thing came to hand, done it faithfully, cheerfully, and a little whimsically. They hadn't been able to pluck the flowers of his talent, because they had always needed the fruit; but they had never been sordid, and they had never consented for a moment to believe that the glittering material chance mightn't come. If it hadn't been for the children—Rhoda caught her breath as the last log fell down to ashes—well, if it hadn't been for their children, they would have had enough to renew the cup of adventure, to keep it always brimming and bubbling at their lips. They were well off, for two. They weren't well off, for six; and if anything connected with their marriage could have been sordid—it couldn't!—it would have been the fees for specialists and the absurdly monotonous way in which each child managed to combine its parents' poorest features. They had been too much in love not to want children; for each of them not privately and passionately to desire increase from that other fairest creature. No, there had never—

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

Rhoda reiterated vehemently to herself—since the world began, been but one way. Even poor, dull, little, stammering Stanton—their only boy—was in the antique tradition. It was certainly very much in the antique tradition (Rhoda was apt to frame her sentiment in irony: apples of gold in pictures of silver) that your children should reproduce their ancestors rather than their parents. Poor little Stanton! How they had hovered over his cradle, and how resolutely, during the years, had each refused to put into words the wonder that daily grew! How could Stanton be Roland's boy? How could he be Rhoda's son? The doctors all shook their heads over him—felt his back, looked in his throat, did all the things that cost so much. And still Stanton peered and stammered, and reacted to life with a simplicity that had in it nothing idyllic. Just a dear, pathetically dull, and mysteriously ailing child. . . . And the little girls: they were well-mannered—of course! but they might have been anybody's children. No one, Rhoda thought as she sat waiting for the two men, would ever have taken them for Roland Glave's. Chin in hand, for a change, she reflected on the odd

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

usury of romance. "It's worth everything," she said silently; "and that is probably why it charges you a hundred per cent."

And then she heard Haysthorpe's uneven step and her husband's voice. Nearly two; what *had* they been talking of? She rose to greet them. No time to-night to put the problem of Stanton. Roland would be tired, and she knew as well as he what a pile of books had to be got through with on the morrow. But Haysthorpe was not to be blamed, ever; and the new problem about Stanton could wait. Strange, pitiful little Stanton!

"Rhoda!" Glave's fine Roman features (small wonder that Haysthorpe mocked him with "Petronius Arbiter"!) grew gravely bright. "Did you stay up for us? I thought you would have been asleep long since."

"I finished Peggy's dress for the birthday party, and you know what a duffer I am at sewing. Then I came down for conversation, and waited up for sheer curiosity to see what Geoffrey had done with you." Even to Haysthorpe she couldn't, just then, mention Stanton as a problem.

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

"The most extraordinary things!" Glave exclaimed. "Haven't you, Haysthorpe?"

"Apparently." Haysthorpe stood by the fire; but neither its warmth nor exercise in the night air brought any tinge into his colorless face. His pallor was natural; the pallor almost of alabaster, beneath his smooth fair hair. He had, too, save for his intimates, a marble manner; so that, altogether, a world given to stupid epithets could not be much blamed for calling him cold. "Apparently, Rhoda. I've startled him, at all events, into tremendous form."

"Form! You startled me into sheer delirium. I must have been a spectacle! Rhoda, dear, why did you stay away all the evening?"

"I waited as long as I could, and when Rhoda didn't come —" Haysthorpe began, apologetically.

"It was really my last minute for Peggy's dress," sighed Rhoda. She knew from Roland's look that he had genuinely missed her; that whatever Haysthorpe had imparted was something he hadn't wanted to taste alone. She didn't like missing Ro-

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

land himself "in tremendous form." He was so good; no one could know so well as she how good he was. He would talk you into the midst of the Pleiades, whisk you up to the verge of Saturn. *She* knew. Fifteen years of marriage—marriage which is happiness in the form of the fugue!—had taught her patience but had whetted her appetite. Peggy's dress seemed like the finger of Fate. The children (bless them!) took so much time—wasted so much, if it came to that. Whatever they did, they seemed to do with a happy eye on eternity.

"I must go to bed now," said Rhoda; "but you might tell me in three words."

"Oh, three words!" protested Haysthorpe. "Look how long it's taken me. But . . . how would 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' do?"

"'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,' " she repeated. "Oh, if it's just another epigram you've been polishing on Roland——"

"Let it go at 'Liberty,' " sang out Glave. "Geoffrey has chartered a yacht for the Hesperides, and puts us in command, with the kiddies for cargo. He's off to Cimmeria, himself."

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

Haysthorpe left the fire, limped across to Rhoda, and took her hands in his.

"It's only that it's been my luck, my dear, to put him and adventure together in a phrase that told. The Great Person liked the phrase, and has always been in private moments a serious admirer of Roland's. Why not make one of the private moments public? I suggested it. He caught on like wild-fire. I answered for our boy up to the hilt. . . . You see, I *do* sometimes dine out with my relatives. And now you two have really only to decide."

"What is it?" Her cleverness seemed all to have deserted her. She beat wildly in a bright fog of conjecture.

"A perfectly good, though naturally very small, diplomatic post. Minister to Something-or-other with a lovely climate, where you can afford twenty servants and pick your food, in courses, off the trees. Not a thing for Glave to do, really, but produce masterpieces, and now and then practise his impeccable Spanish on dignitaries. What price *that, madame l'ambassadrice?*" He smiled at her impassive face; then, as he bent to kiss her hand, whispered, "Look at him."

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

She did look at Glave, and caught her breath. Never but once before had she seen that light in his eyes—the eyes of a man who stands face to face with Fortune, breasting her smile. Fifteen years before, she had caught her breath in the same way. All these years she had thought of it as a light that passes with youth. But . . . even Haysthorpe's colorless face reflected it now with a faint lunar glow.

She could not speak, yet every instant that she delayed, she knew, would make her reply, when it came, more inadequate. At last she gave it up. "Dear Geoffrey," she murmured, laying her hand on his arm for an instant. Then she stood before her husband. Him she did not touch—for all Haysthorpe, their common tensity could melt only into a straining embrace. She flung her head back—deliberately; she was sure she smiled. "*It is Hesperia!*" she cried. "But I can't say things to-night. We'll talk all day to-morrow. And there, you dears, are your whiskey and your soda. You understand?"

They did understand, their faces assured her, and she fled. They didn't, poor darlings, but she would go quickly to her own room and light her bale-fires there, if need be.

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

In spite of Rhoda's gallant prophecy, all the next day couldn't, of course, go in talk. There were the children's lessons—next year they hoped to afford a school for Peggy and Julia at least, but this year Stanton had eaten up, month by month, the fluctuating balance; there was the birthday party, for which they had to be dressed and to which they had to be taken; there was the fatal plumber—two of him, as always, to upset the kitchen and demoralize the cook. On Roland's side, there were the books that couldn't wait, and that had to be looked at, at least, before they could be reviewed. Not until evening—and even then Roland was still in the library, tackling the last of the hysterical group—could she sit down with Haysthorpe and beg for details.

"Roland and I haven't dared to begin," she explained. "Everything would have gone by the board if we had once started on—'Hesperia.' It's had to wait—but here we are."

"Couldn't he chuck the trash for one day? Especially now that——"

Rhoda smiled. "I'm afraid not even now. And

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

my trash certainly couldn't be chucked. Besides—" She hesitated. They must seem ungrateful. Of course, Roland would have chucked anything for a day, if she had asked him to. If she could only explain to Haysthorpe that her delaying, so easily made to seem of necessity, was half cowardice, half sheer aching mercy for Roland and the vision in which, for a few hours, he was walking! She knew—she read it in his every gesture—that it wasn't so bad even to write reviews of inferior novels with a pen perhaps destined to trace his own masterpiece some day, in Hesperia. How much, she wondered, could she, in loyalty, say to Haysthorpe? It wasn't loyal, of course, to say anything to him that hadn't first been said, or implied, to Roland. The whole question was: how much had Roland inferred from her few hesitating phrases? Perhaps everything. If they could only find a way out! Perhaps she was morbid; too much given to scenting frustration in every new wind that blew. It was a little her habit to read life too personally; to believe superstitiously that because she had had so much, she couldn't, in mere mathematics, have any more. Fate didn't

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

give you Roland *and* Hesperia, she reasoned. She did not stop to ask whether Fate couldn't perhaps give Roland both Hesperia and her. That would have been stupid juggling; modesty aside, she knew what she meant to Roland. Besides, it was always too easy to see him as doomed by his very beauty. Yet it wasn't a moment for superstition; it was a moment for all the humor one had.

"It's hard to take life at its word," she threw out, as she groped.

"Oh, if ever two people played fair with life, it's you. You needn't be afraid, Rhoda."

His face was all kindness. He didn't think them ungrateful. He trusted them. Dear Haysthorpe!

"You haven't had any time, really, have you?" he went on. "I kept Roland up until three, I confess. I have to go to-morrow, you know."

Rhoda wavered. "Only five minutes—while he was shaving. He couldn't say much!" She laughed. "And the children have been about. We can't discuss it before them. They would begin to pack their little trunks—and that *would* be a mess to clear up!" Still she wavered, but her resolve was beginning to

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

harden. She went on, in another tone. She heard, herself, that her tone had changed. It reassured her.

"I said to him that we must think hard. The children, I mean. . . . Of course there couldn't be any question for Roland or me. It *is* liberty."

"I've always thought, you know," said Hays-thorpe slowly, "that Roland had more than one string to his bow. He's got so much history and politics and sociology stowed away. Wendell realized that. He had read the 'Contemporary Essays.' It's a little place, but in these days even little places are important—anything may happen overnight, with Japan and Germany going such a pace. If he made good—and that's only a question of opportunity—he would be in the direct line for some of the better places. I don't mean the biggest capitals—the retreats for superannuated millionaires—but the important minor posts."

"Oh, I know, I know!" Hadn't she spent the hours from two to seven that morning thinking of the magnificent chance it would be for her magnificent mate? She could have believed diplomacy invented in the dawn of time for the sake of being

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

justified in the twentieth century by Roland Glave. There was no limit to Rhoda's deterministic power to read all history in the light of her special revelation.

"Of course you know, my dear. But I couldn't help saying it. And I think Roland himself feels that. Gad! If you could have heard him talk last night out in the open! He oughtn't to be sacrificed as he has been all these years. Wherever he is, he's really at the top; but he ought to be so visibly at the top that fools have to crane their necks. I don't know what *The Cosmic Review* will do without him, but I'd jolly well like to see. Didn't even have the sense to give him the editorship when old What's-his-name died!"

"You can't blame them. He *would* have run it into the ground, you know. Think of the articles he wouldn't have printed!" Rhoda fell into the old laughing tolerance for a moment. *The Cosmic* might have been an ant-hill and they good-natured strollers.

Haysthorpe smiled absently. He seemed to be thinking. "Do you really mean it seriously about the children? Is it their dreadful little education that's worrying you?"

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

"Geoffrey, how can you?" She spoke lightly, but her eyes were fixed, as if on a great incoming wave. "I shan't worry about their education so long as they have the privilege of living under their father's roof. And you don't need to be told that it's much better luck for dear little girls with no particular brains to be the daughters of a United States minister *anywhere*, than to go even to the schools we can't afford."

"Stanton, then?"

The great incoming wave had broken now in spray all about her. She had to struggle to keep her footing. To run was impossible. Quickly she decided. It would have to be said to-morrow, if not to-night; and perhaps Geoffrey could make it easier for Roland if he knew. Yet she blamed herself bitterly both for her cowardice and her mercy, that had somehow caused her to let Haysthorpe have the fact in its crudity before she had done more than hint it to Roland. She would go to Roland at once, of course; and then he and Haysthorpe could have it out. The morrow, she knew, would bring her the old routine; since, though with such good excuse,

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

she had funked it all day, there was no hope now of the proper sequence. But the violated etiquette—never before violated by her—of the supreme human relation seemed to her monstrous. The notion of telling even Geoffrey first!

“Listen, Geoffrey. Roland, you know, had been away for a week before he joined you in town and brought you down. Otherwise I shouldn’t be doing this ugly thing. It *is* ugly—perhaps I had better go to him now.” She rose unsteadily.

Haysthorpe’s hand pushed her gently back into her chair. “You’re incapable of doing anything ugly, Rhoda. Something’s troubling you that you haven’t yet let Roland in on. That’s it, isn’t it?”

She nodded.

“Something you’d have to tell me, anyhow?”

“Oh, yes, at once.”

“It’s all right, my dear girl. Tell me now, while Roland’s finishing, and then go straight to him. It’s I, with my proposition, that have somehow made the thing so hard to tell him—I can see that. Or you’d have dragged him off yesterday, the minute we got in.”

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

She nodded again. "Oh, yesterday, I thought it could wait." She added bitterly: "I thought it had better wait until you had gone. And now it comes to my telling you first!"

Haysthorpe leaned forward, moving into the light. His tense face gleamed at her.

"Listen, Rhoda. You shall do whatever you think is right—of course. But remember this: neither one of us gives a fig for the other compared with Roland. I'd chuck you, as you'd chuck me, any day, for him. Well, then, we can't be doing anything very dreadful. And I rather think, you know, since you have to tell me anyhow, you'd better tell me now. There's so little time. Between us, we might go over the ground and think of some way out—something to make it easier for him. He'll need it, Rhoda—he'll need it. And you need to tell. I can see that, you poor dear." No trace of the marble manner now.

"It may seem to you sordid—unreasonable," she began. "You've no children."

He showed her a white grimace. "No, thank God!"

"It's nothing to thank God for, Geoffrey." The

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

wave had ebbed now, and she stood firm upon the sands. "Quite the contrary," she pursued resolutely. "Only I know what poor, darling, little Stanton must seem to you, set beside Roland." ("And to me" were the words that followed in her voiceless heart.) "But Stanton is there; and while Roland was off shooting last week, Dr. Tuck sent for me. He doesn't know; he can't promise or prophesy; but the chances are that Stanton will have to have a bad operation—perhaps two or three, in the next years. It's all very complicated and obscure—Roland will have to see Dr. Tuck, and make out more than I could—but everything depends on his being set straight. He'll have to be watched, and at the first sign of certain symptoms he'll have to be rushed off to Moorfeldt. He's at a critical age, apparently. 'There's nothing to do but wait,' Dr. Tuck said; 'you're very fortunate to be near New York, where Moorfeldt could have him at once.' And for a long time—even if everything comes right—he will be very, very delicate. And you see"—all her misery was in her cry—"Stanton must have his chance."

Haysthorpe had risen while she was speaking,

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

and as she finished he stood with his back to her, looking out through the dark window.

"What about Roland's chance?" he said thickly.

"You ask *me* that?"

"I was asking Omniscience, Rhoda, not you."

For a moment there was silence, silence quite unbroken by any reply from Omniscience. At last Haysthorpe turned back to her. "Have you told Roland anything?"

"Only that, in this connection, I was worried about Stanton. Dr. Tuck sent for me quite unexpectedly. Roland could hardly guess—except that, of course, we've always had to worry about Stanton. And now," she said after a little pause, "I think I must go to Roland. Poor darling!"

"Wait!" Haysthorpe's hand shot up. "Before you go, I want you to think. You needn't, just because you're a mother, mind my asking you to think. You're the best woman I've ever known—if that is any comfort to you for what I'm going to say. *Are you sure you are right?* I love Stanton, too—always have loved the little beggar since I stood beside him at the christening font. I'd love any son of you

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

two. But if it's between him and Roland, Roland's worth twice Stanton—worth a hundred times Stanton, either to me or in the open market. And this strikes me as being Roland's last big chance. I don't suggest your doing anything brutal or bad. But couldn't you leave Stanton here? Isn't there any one who would love the boy and see him through? God knows I'd do it myself if I were up to it."

"No one is up to that, Geoffrey, except his father and his mother. Stanton's not old enough to understand the situation, but he's old enough to have his heart broken. And they can break ours from the day they're born!" She bit back the emotion that surged up and phrased itself. "There isn't any one, Geoffrey, and he isn't strong enough for school. Just as a practical proposition, it's impossible. There's no question but that Roland will see it in the same way."

"Is Tuck sure of saving the boy?"

She shook her head. "No. He's not sure of anything except that it will take all that any of us can do to give him just a fighting chance."

"Would you let Roland go on ahead for a time without you?"

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

She looked at him gravely. "I shall propose that to him, of course. But I doubt if we could afford it."

His sternness melted. "Rhoda," he cried, "please understand! I'm a beast to put you on the rack like this, but I just can't help fighting to get out of the net. Here is one of the best minds of our time—we both know that—and since it has come to maturity, it has never had freedom. It isn't for myself I want Roland a great man; it's for the world. Let clods mate and go under for the sake of their offspring. I defy anybody's offspring—even his own!—to be so important as Roland Glave. You think I wish ill to poor little Stanton—I don't. But I don't wish to see Roland despoiled for Stanton's problematical sake. I don't see what the world gets out of that. The bird in the hand is worth all four in the bush, if it comes to that. And you know as well as I do that this is practically a question of Roland's future. It's because the day's so late, and it's all so damnably important, that I'm behaving like this. To have Roland go under because he mayn't live anywhere but on some specialist's front stoop! . . .

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

I love you both, and this thing is making me sick enough to die. What it's doing to you I don't even dare to think, my poor, dear Rhoda!"

Rhoda Glave had covered her face with her hand. "I have said all that over to myself so many times in the last years, Geoffrey, that I can't even feel the impulse to tell you not to apologize, to tell you that I understand. Could a woman be Roland's wife and not feel as you do about it? You are bitter against me——"

He shook his head. "I am not."

She went on, still holding her hand over her eyes. "You are bitter against me, Geoffrey, because you believe that every mother is just a lioness crouching beside her cubs. You think I'm following some brainless instinct. It's a thing you've never faced for yourself, and so you fall back on all the old fables. I couldn't explain to you, if I would, how mistaken you are about me—and I wouldn't if I could. I don't understand any better than you what Nature is up to—with her birds in the bush. I know that Stanton isn't equal to Roland—not even with Peggy and Julia and Marian thrown in. It seems to me that

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

I must know it better even than you do. But it somehow doesn't change anything."

She let her hand fall, and rose. "I am going to Roland now. I shall tell him as briefly as possible what Dr. Tuck told me, and that I've had to let you know. Then I shall send him straight to you." She looked Haysthorpe between the eyes. "I give you my word, and I shan't be induced to break it. You can count on me. If there is any way under heaven in which you can work on Roland to make him go, I shall think you the better man for trying it."

She moved to the door. As she passed his chair, she bent over and touched his forehead with her fingers. "We don't understand any better than you do, Geoffrey," she murmured. "The only difference between us is that we accept it and you don't."

"You absolutely speak for him?" He detained her one more instant.

"I won't touch him, Geoffrey. I give him to you. You have my word. But I know." She closed the door softly behind her.

It was a relief—could not be otherwise—when Geoffrey, his white face looking strangely gray and

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

ghastly as he came out into the sunless afternoon, limped down the walk to his cab. All three showed the strain of the sleepless night and the dreary morning with the pitiless convention of its routine, in which the skilful silences and the tactful chatter, before children and servants, had been interruptions that did not help. Rhoda Glave had kept her word to Haysthorpe. Roland had come to him ten minutes after she left. Up-stairs in her own room, Rhoda, watch in hand, gave them an interminable hour. She dreaded going down to them as, she believed, she had never dreaded anything before; yet no hour had ever seemed so long. It was like bringing the weight of Stanton into the world again, she thought; only this time with knowledge instead of hope. Before she went down she looked in the mirror, smoothed her hair, cooled her temples with *eau de cologne*, powdered the deep blue circles under her eyes, lifted her head high, smiled courage at her own blurred reflection—performed all the pathetic, vain ritual of feminine preparation. A moment later, without knocking, she entered the room.

Immediately Glave's arm was about her and

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

Glave's smile was full upon her face; though he finished his sentence to Haysthorpe before he spoke to her. Even then it was only "Sit down, dear—here," and he went on talking as if she had been there from the beginning. She rejoiced in the warmth of his perfect inclusion of her in himself, as if it had been fear of separation that numbed her. She had been sure, as she told Geoffrey; but there was unspeakable comfort in feeling sure there by his side, in watching him feel as she felt, react as she reacted—in having only to listen, as it were, to hear herself speak with Roland's golden tongue. That had been the supreme symbol to her always of their marriage: her joy of listening to him as to her own inmost convictions phrased by a god. And now, though the matter was so sad—though the god was phrasing their doom—her mated self was once more at peace. She did not need Haysthorpe's haggard "He sees it as you do, Rhoda," to find all her pity spending itself on poor Geoffrey, who with rage unspeakable had seen his miracle fail before his eyes. He was like—her weary but irrepressible fancy told her—a Jacobite noble pleading with a Pretender.

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

The talk had gone on for hours; and always Dr. Tuck recurred like some devil out of the machine. They couldn't get away from the fact; they couldn't get away from the situation. By midnight they seemed, to Rhoda's tired brain, petrified into a symbolic group: Geoffrey hoarse with the amount of bitter common sense he had talked, she and Roland fixed for all time in some mythological attitude of parenthood—something for archæologists to interpret. It wasn't that they didn't long to be delivered from their Laokoönesque posture; they dealt in figures, in probabilities, in symptoms, in metaphors, in every known language, while Stanton—little, frustrating Stanton, the frail fruit of their flesh, the goal of their desire—slept ignorantly above. Each practical suggestion of Haysthorpe's—sometimes fantastic in its conception of concrete possibilities—brought to Rhoda an unreal hope that died as soon as she turned the eye of reason on it. Once—with a quick first look, as of an accomplice, at Haysthorpe—she asked quietly: "Could you perhaps go without me, Roland, leaving me to follow when I could?"

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

She had proved herself a woman of her word; which was her sole compensation for the accent of his "Rhoda! Never!"

As for Glave, he had perhaps never heard so many superlatives lavished upon himself as in that hour. Haysthorpe let him have it straight: all the praise that he had garnered during the years from others, and kept in his loyal, inarticulate heart, poured forth in a golden stream. Glave flushed beneath it, and caught helplessly at Rhoda's hand. Yet he might have felt some justice in it, some belated compensation for incommensurate rewards; for he only said, "Even so, Geoffrey, the situation isn't changed. If you give 'hostages to Fortune'—well, you've your duty to your hostages. Ask any army man." And once, when Geoffrey was treating the black future in the epic manner, he turned to Rhoda almost with amusement. "My dear, does he think we don't know *that*?"

So it had gone, through hours, until Geoffrey, broken and beaten, took his candle and went to his room. Rhoda, as she stood in the door, put her hands on his shoulders. "Geoffrey, Geoffrey," she whispered,

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

“Roland’s above everything; but do you think this is easy for me?”

“I think it will kill you, in the end,” he answered. “You don’t, either of you, seem to see what I’m pleading for—the survival of the fittest. You treat me like a blasphemer.”

For the first and last time in her life Rhoda Glave bent and kissed Geoffrey Haysthorpe’s cheek. “No, Geoffrey dear, no,” she said. “We love you more than we ever loved you before.”

If it was a relief when Geoffrey went, it was still more of a relief when night closed in, when the young voices were still, and Roland Glave and his wife were left alone. They had much to go over; much separate talk on the part of each with Haysthorpe to be recounted; much sad and quiet discussion of the meagre, authoritative words of Dr. Tuck; much quick planning of the terrifyingly expensive future; much tender, atoning mention of Stanton himself. The little girls were forgotten—Hesperia would have done well enough for them! Both knew that bitter reactions would come; Glave braced himself, in the intervals, to the sub-editorship that his

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

sensitive independence had long refused; Rhoda saw, in the silent instants, white hospital cots and the cheerful masks of nurses. . . . Both clung to the slight exaltation left them, made conscious afresh of the numbered years. At the end Rhoda drew near to her husband.

"I was glad, in a way, to have Geoffrey say it to me," she said. "I've so often felt it without daring to say it. Nature is a terrible futurist—and I'm not. Nothing is worth your chance to me. It seems like madness to give it up. My brain can't justify us. Once it seemed the most beautiful thing in the world for you to be repeated in human form. Now I know you can't be. In a thousand years nothing will happen so good as you. We're not even gambling. But it's the way we chose. . . ."

"It's the way we chose," he repeated firmly.

"The world won't thank us," she went on. "What will, I wonder?" Not the deaf generations, she thought to herself, to which we all sacrifice.

"Not Geoffrey," she heard Glave saying. "He will never understand. But he will always love us just the same. He'll have to. We haven't answered

THE BIRD IN THE BUSH

him. Life has answered him. Call it God, if you must. . . . I'm awfully tired."

"Tired, my darling?" Her drooping head rose with the old quick gesture.

"Not really tired, my own. No, never *really* tired!"

They clasped each other, so utterly at one that even Hesperia seemed a mere trick of the sunlight upon the sea.

THE MIRACLE

THE MIRACLE

“MAY Roderick come in to say good-bye to his mother?” Vincent Sayle addressed the trained nurse with a beautiful deference. Miss Maddox assented. “Oh, yes, I think so. He’s not an hysterical child, is he?” She did not, by the least turn of the head in Mrs. Sayle’s direction, pretend to consult her on the point. Rosina broke in, however, from her *chaise-longue*.

“Roderick hysterical? Why, he’s bursting with health. Of course he can come in. I *must* see him.”

In spite of the spirited freshness of her tone, the two pairs of eyes interrogated each other over her head. A mute decision passed between them, and Sayle went out of the room to fetch the boy.

Rosina Sayle lifted herself a little on her lavender pillows. “You all are too absurd, Miss Maddox. I’m still a human being, you know, if little Vincent is going to be born as soon as he’ll condescend to arrive. I give you fair warning: I don’t want hole-

THE MIRACLE

and-corner consultations, and I don't want things kept from me. They don't have to be. I'm really not a fool." Firmness and gayety were evenly balanced in her tone.

The grave mouth of the nurse widened slightly in a smile. "Don't worry, Mrs. Sayle. We have no desire to keep things from you."

Rosina shivered inwardly at the "we"—the mystic federation that it implied. Oh, all for her good! But who wants a secret society working in the dark for one's benefit?

"Here he is." Vincent Sayle swung his five-year-old son lightly down from a broad shoulder, beside his stepmother's couch.

"Good-bye, dear. Tell Aunt Pauline I said you might have ice-cream once a week. Have a good time, Roddy, and you shall see baby brother when he's a day old." She lifted her arms to clasp the sturdy little figure and kissed his cheek heartily.

"Are you sick?" he asked very gravely.

"Dear me, no! But I may be, just a little. So Aunt Pauline is going to take you, and you'll see Daddy every day. You'll come home very soon.

THE MIRACLE

We couldn't get on without you. Good-bye." She kissed him again and lay back on her pillows.

"Good-bye." He turned to his father. "Can I drive the goats?"

"I think so." They went out together, Miss Maddox following them.

"I wonder what Vincent will be like when *he* is five," murmured Rosina with closed eyes. "Different from Roddy, I should think. And yet, who knows? Oh, Vincent, Vincent darling, what are you going to be like?" Then she covered her face with her hands. "Suppose it shouldn't happen; suppose I shouldn't love him as much as I want to; suppose there shouldn't be any miracle!" Then she flung her arms wide and stared at the sunlight—great, hollow, golden gulfs of it beyond her couch. "Isn't it like me, not to be willing to wait and see—to be worrying and worrying, as if anything I could do beforehand would make any difference?"

Miss Maddox re-entered the room with a tray. Rosina Sayle ate her soup slowly. Suddenly she turned to the nurse. "Do you think he'll be fair or dark? His inheritance is evenly divided, all the way

THE MIRACLE

back. So Mendel doesn't help me out. Mendel doesn't, anyhow, unless you have as many children as guinea-pigs. What do you think?" She looked very young and eager propounding the question.

"There's no telling, Mrs. Sayle. And it won't make a bit of difference to you after the baby comes. It may be a girl, too—you don't seem to have thought of that."

"A girl? I should think not! Would I spend my time having a girl? Girls are very rare in my family. The two oldest are always boys, and often there are no girls at all. Besides, what do you people know about it? I'm the only one who knows anything about that blessed baby. And I've never, from the first minute, been in doubt on that point. A girl, indeed! He isn't in the least like a girl."

Miss Maddox laughed outright. She had heard other young mothers predict quite wrongly every physical detail of their first-born. It was a perfectly well-known symptom of maternity. The prescribed treatment was not to contradict.

"I think I'll have a most beautiful nap," Mrs. Sayle yawned widely, after she had finished her

THE MIRACLE

luncheon. "And when my husband comes back from Mrs. Dart's, will you send him up to me? I want to ask him about something. Thank you. And now I'm quite all right. Here's the bell, and Frances will get me anything I need. Do go and have a lovely walk in the garden. I think you're rather silly not to go farther, with things as they are, but I suppose you are right. Oh—if you would just give me that book in my bedroom, by the reading-lamp . . ."

Mrs. Sayle's voice was exquisitely modulated. It ran through a hundred silver notes, accentuating here and there with a feather-like emphasis.

"The blue book you were reading this morning?" Miss Maddox's tone was not approving.

"Yes—*Holy Dying*."

The nurse brought it, with a grudging smile. "There are half a dozen new novels down-stairs, Mr. Sayle said."

"Yes; I'll take those later. Just at present I can't do with anything but really good stuff. I give you my professional word as a patient that it doesn't depress me in the least. Quite the contrary." Rosina Sayle waved her hand as the nurse left the room.

THE MIRACLE

Cheering though Jeremy Taylor may have been to her, she did not take him up at once. Instead, she lay in her long chair, pondering, as she had done so many times in the last months, over the adventure that was so soon to have its climax there, under that roof, herself the protagonist. "It is the inevitability that appals one," she murmured. "I've never before been up against anything concerning myself that I couldn't have stopped—couldn't, I mean, if I had willed it supremely. But there's no discharge in this war. It is extraordinary, for all it's so natural." And then she fell to musing silently, for there were some things that, even in her solitary soliloquy, she did not put into words. They articulated themselves mutely in the back of her brain; but even the lonely air heard no echo of them—even Vincent Sayle caught no hint, in their intimate spontaneous talks. "You pay for being a New Englander," she had once said to him; and had been silent when he asked her how. You paid precisely in being haunted by all sorts of things your ancestors had abjured. The New England conscience, as Rosina Sayle well knew, can give a very fair imitation of a Witches' Sabbath.

THE MIRACLE

Your real New Englander knows perfectly what it is to meet the devil face to face—to say nothing of all the shapes that he mistakes for the devil. It is characteristic that there is nearly always more than one shape. There is not often the joy of focussing on one antagonist.

Rosina Sayle herself could hardly retrace her own winding path through the thicket of scruples that had intervened between her and happiness. She had not only the New England conscience, she had also the New England sense of humor—the distinctive characteristic of which is that neither grimness nor tragedy prevents its play. Both are apt to be torturing for the possessor. If her heart had had to make it out with the undeniable fact of Vincent Sayle's first happy marriage, her ironic mind had faced as well the latent incongruities in the rôle of stepmother. The stepmother *motif* had jiggged across her romance as the Venusberg music jigs across the Pilgrims' Chorus. She had no fear of not doing her duty by Roderick; she had a good deal of fear of not loving him properly. She wasn't fond of children; she hadn't the miscellaneous maternal instinct with which some

THE MIRACLE

women are happily furnished. She had hoped that the miracle of marriage would include Roderick in its magical sphere—that when life turned her into Vincent's wife it would somehow turn her, with the same gesture, into Roderick's mother. And it had not done so. She didn't know, even now, on the edge of experience, what a mother felt. She was even afraid that she shouldn't feel the quintessential maternal passion for her own child. But, after all, that must take care of itself. If that extraordinary and ugly thing happened, it wouldn't be her fault. She had loved her husband passionately and had wanted her child; she had performed all the proper preliminaries, and probably she would be the average mother. If she couldn't, it would prove her the monster she still refrained from calling herself. She was quite sure, on the other hand, that no mother felt so detached from her child as she felt from Roderick. He was pleasant, he was good, he was lovable; but nothing tore at her when he came and went. She hadn't achieved the paradox of feeling him in any way part of herself. Her conscience saw to it that she should therefore wrap him, all the

THE MIRACLE

more stifflingly, in practical kindness, in patient listening, in canny forethought. On the whole, she had put it through pretty well, she thought. Roderick must, with the philosophy of childhood, have made up his mind that mamma was like that. Perhaps, his own mother having died in his infancy, he didn't miss anything; perhaps he didn't know that most mothers took their little boys more naturally, more spontaneously, than she. Why, she fixed her smile and pitched her voice when she heard him coming, as mechanically as if she were a court lady following a prescribed etiquette. She felt as ceremonious, when she heard his prayers at night, as if she were attending a *coucher du dauphin*.

All this she had grown used to, hoping now and then that Roddy didn't realize. But with her own son coming—ah, should she be able to manage that? Would not her instincts riot about him? Would not her mental and physical muscles respond so naturally to his appeal that even five-year-old Roddy could see the difference? Would Roddy spoil, for her, her own maternity? If she didn't love her child as most mothers do, she would be, for herself, a monster;

THE MIRACLE

and if she did, then wouldn't she be a monster for Roddy? She had no physical fear of the event that lay before her—it wasn't in her tradition to fear natural things. If your delicate flesh shuddered a little, you remembered the women in the slums at the mercy of ignorant midwives, and then for very pride you stopped shuddering. But a moral fear was upon her; and if she blamed Roddy for any of the things that were not his fault (she tried so hard not to!) it was for giving her a terror that she couldn't disclose to her husband. *That* didn't seem quite fair of Roddy. She hadn't stepped between him and his father—she was almost ridiculous about not intruding. It was up to Roddy not to come between her and her husband. Oh, not up to Roddy (to the end her brain would try to do justice), but to his guardian angel—to whatever power it is that stands responsible for the irresponsible young soul. She should really like to have it out with Roderick's guardian angel! And then she laughed to, and at, herself—for the New England sense of humor sometimes makes an unnatural meal of the New England conscience.

THE MIRACLE

Vincent Sayle interrupted her reflections at this desirable point. He bent to kiss her, and before he had raised his head she asked:

“Is he all right?”

“Roddy? Of course. I left him in the buckboard, driving the goats, with Thomas dropping everything to watch him. They’ll spoil him to death over there.”

“Don’t you think we spoil him, too?” she asked with wistful haste.

“You do, my dear. I try not to.”

“Oh yes; I mean to spoil him. I want to spoil him.”

“Why?”

The question was serious, but Rosina Sayle did not intend to break out now in exposition of her secret mood. She had saved Vincent so long: she would go through with it. Later, with their own little son—theirs—between them, she might have to speak. But not now; not until the climax had been reached.

“Because that is what mothers are for.” She hated to toss it off with conventional sentimentality, but she could not speak yet.

“It seems a little odd,” she went on, “that you and Marian didn’t name Roderick ‘Vincent.’”

THE MIRACLE

"Of course it is his middle name."

"Yes, but it should have been his first—your eldest son."

"Marian didn't like repeating names in a family. And we were both especially fond of 'Roderick.'"

They had always talked about Vincent's first wife—not with any morbid effort to bring her into their own context, but often enough to prove to themselves that she was a subject that could be discussed. Rosina, though she had never known Marian, had made a point of it; and the fine fibre of her husband's consciousness had responded delicately to every stress of hers. Rosina often wondered why she could be natural about Marian and not about Roderick. Perhaps because Marian wasn't there and Roderick was.

"You don't mind my calling him Vincent? I couldn't have him anything else. We'll find a nickname in time, if you don't want any one else to have your name."

"Of course I don't mind." He smiled at her.

"I feel, you see, that there ought always now, for all time, to be a Vincent Sayle in the world. His

THE MIRACLE

son, and his son—on forever. Even if the name is all they have of you, better that than nothing.”

He smiled again, then looked at his watch.

“If you could, dear, I think it would be well for you to take a little turn on the porch in the sun. You know Dr. Betts wanted you to, up to the last minute.”

Rosina rose obediently and carefully. Again she had the curious sense of not belonging to herself—of being a chattel, managed for her own good. She didn’t mind being her husband’s chattel, but she resented faintly the temporary suppression of her personality in all other minds.

“Promise me, Vincent,” she said, as they went out on the wide upper porch, “that you’ll tell me everything, straight through.” Then, as she saw his face darken ever so slightly: “No, I won’t make you promise a thing; but remember, if there’s danger, or a complication, or a decision—unless I’m absolutely unconscious—I want to know. I would tell *you*. One wants to face things with one’s own intelligence. And I think my intelligence is all there. I’m not hysterical, am I?”

THE MIRACLE

"No, dear; you're not hysterical."

"I'm not challenging your rights. As far as I am concerned, your decision would always go. But it would go because I love you, not because I am an imbecile. So if anything does come up, I want to be told. I'm not an entry in a card-catalogue."

"I understand, my dear. I think you know I'd always tell you unless the doctor said it was absolutely unsafe. You're a very sensible woman, but you can't always control your temperature, for example."

"Oh yes, I can—unless I'm being worried with a mystery!"

They laughed. "Can't you trust me, Rosina?" There was a pleading note in Vincent Sayle's voice. Had he, Rosina wondered, some special reason for not promising—for wanting to be trusted? She was suddenly sure that he had. The first physical fear that she had known for months gripped her.

But she was loyal. "Of course I can, dear. I know that you will always do the absolutely right thing. Only I want you to realize that not being allowed to face at first what you've got to face at last is the

THE MIRACLE

real going down into the Valley of the Shadow. Don't tell me anything, ever, that you think it best not. After all"—she turned to him as they entered the wide door of her sitting-room—"in any right sense, if you know a thing, I know it. It's all one. To say anything else would be a quibble. But I do rather wish little Vincent wouldn't delay like this. It's too coquettish—it almost makes me afraid he's a girl." She lay down again, Vincent helping her, on the *chaise-longue*. "Is Miss Maddox there? Then I think I'll go to sleep for a little. Go and read a book, dear. I hear you have some beautiful novels down-stairs. I have a lot of things to say to you, but I'm not going to say them now."

He bent over her. "Would it make you feel better to say them, dear?"

"No; it would make me feel worse. They can wait until it's all over. If anything should happen to me"—he frowned as if with a sudden stab of neuralgia—"they wouldn't need to be said. They aren't anything that affects you and me at all. In that sense, they're not important. Afterwards, afterwards . . ." Rosina turned a little uncomfortably on her pillows.

THE MIRACLE

"Do you feel ill?"

"Ill? No. I feel most annoyingly well. Isn't this ever going to begin, I wonder? It's all overture; and I'm a little tired, at the end of the evening, so to speak, of waiting for the curtain to go up. So must you be, you poor darling. Oh yes, Miss Maddox! Just stay in my bedroom and read a book, if you don't mind. I'm going to sleep, and Mr. Sayle is going down-stairs to read his book. Every one must read a book at once, except me. I'm let off." She smiled vaguely at the two, and composed herself, with closed eyes, for a nap.

Sleep took her soon, so that she did not hear the whispered consultation in her bedroom or the ring of the telephone down-stairs, nor yet the muffled, nervous talk with the doctor at the other end of the wire. It was not without reason that Vincent Sayle, facing the operation that he had promised the doctor to give his wife no hint of until the morrow, had asked Rosina to trust him.

Rosina Sayle had only an hour before the operation itself in which to face her crisis consciously. The hour was sufficient, and Vincent Sayle realized

THE MIRACLE

that the distrusted Dr. Betts had been right in insisting that the patient should not miss the chance of a good night. Vincent Sayle, whom nobody was "saving," had the long hours of the night to carry Rosina's burden for her. There was no appeal from the doctor's decision: if Mrs. Sayle knew about the operation beforehand, her temperature might go sky-high. At present she was in excellent condition, and they must keep any advantage she gave them, by hook or crook. It was very doubtful whether anything would be gained by telling her before the surgeon actually arrived; but there Dr. Betts had had to yield to Vincent's assurance that he felt it his duty to forewarn her, to give her an hour to take in the fact that there might be no little Vincent brought into the world.

Sayle resented vicariously their inevitable attempt to suppress Rosina as a responsible being. There was something gruesome in it, even for a modern person like himself. Not that he welcomed the task of breaking it to her—it would have been far more comfortable for him if she had been a chattel morally as well as legally. Hideous, with

THE MIRACLE

no mitigation, was this complete disfranchising of any human being before the tribunal of surgery! They looked to him for permission and consent, as if her body had ceased to be hers and she had no mind. All very necessary, no doubt; and in their case it didn't matter—they were one. But it must be atrocious, sometimes, that formal dragging in of the next of kin before the knife could descend upon the flesh. With Rosina, the case was laughable—her mind was uncannily clear and calm. Yet he bowed conventionally to the pathologic fetich, and spent his wakeful night as in duty bound, while Rosina slept as sweetly as if Jupiter, flaming in the sky above their garden, were a conscious guarantor of her peace. A queer revenge women have wrested from civilization—that the husband must watch their pangs, step by step, in his helpless imaginings, so that the ancient immunity of the male becomes little more than a dishonest slogan in a sex war. So he thought to himself, as he lay wakeful, or listened at Rosina's door to her quiet breathing. He plumbed the paradox of chivalry, without becoming for that a whit the less chivalrous. Even

THE MIRACLE

while he realized that the pain of the beloved is sharper in the flesh than one's own, he none the less exalted the beloved's martyrdom and declared to himself that, compared with her, he went scot-free.

Yet even Vincent Sayle, who knew how to be illogical for another's benefit as well as any gentleman that breathes, felt, as he entered his wife's room the next morning to disclose to her the actual state of things, that his was a hard task. He was worried to the core of him by her tears. Rosina did her best to keep them back, but at first she could do nothing but sob on his shoulder—a melting contrast to the eager, faintly-flushed creature he had seen a moment before, high against lacy pillows. She faltered it all out between sobs: she had been so well; she had supposed the long waiting natural enough; she hadn't dreamed that, whatever happened, little Vincent could do anything but take triumphant possession of the world. How could the hushed house of birth be instead a hushed house of death? She shook terribly with her sobs, and Vincent Sayle began to wonder if the doctors hadn't been right—if, perhaps, in one hour of foreknowledge

THE MIRACLE

the beautiful, nervous fabric of hope would not be utterly torn in pieces.

“You mustn’t, Rosina, darling—for his sake and my sake you mustn’t.”

And gradually his factitious calm evoked an image of itself in her. “No, I mustn’t.” She dabbed her eyes dry at last, grew stiller in the white bed, held his arm more gently, essayed a little joke—a mere whisper of mirth.

He had to leave her to speak to the surgeon, who arrived in his car, brisk and ready for action. He had to give more of those stupid authorizations. He had to make the final abdication even of his own stewardship, withdrawing while the doctors and the nurse discussed together. Rosina wasn’t even his property any more—she was theirs; and he felt, in that moment, the full force of the insult science levels at our heads.

Up-stairs, alone for a moment, Rosina took the measure of her changed world. Now that she was at last in the fighting line, with a definite military duty, she was far beyond tears. Her promise to be calm—that precious calm which meant a normal

THE MIRACLE

temperature and nerves in equilibrium—was a sharp sword in her hand. Her own unpremeditated cry, “I want him so!” had taught her part, at least, of what she had so passionately wished to know. She knew now that she loved her child as well as any mother of them all. She wasn’t that kind of monster, at all events: she had never wanted anything (except her husband) as she wanted her baby. She bathed in the genuineness of it, before going down into unconsciousness. Her appeased conscience put off Roddy—there would be time enough later to see how the question of Roddy turned out. Just now she must be lulled and quiet—good material, when drugged, for them to work on. No one could consider it her duty, when little Vincent’s life was in question, to worry about Roddy, happy at Aunt Pauline’s with his goats. She mustn’t let her mind worry her body—that complicated package of nerves and tissues and vital organs, with the blood running about among them in a labyrinthine course. An odd world, she thought, smiling with closed eyes, where you always have to be protecting soul and flesh from each other!

THE MIRACLE

Then sordid, practical things intervened, which she met with set teeth and a heart at peace. It had its dignity, all this, though that was far to seek. Even those white-gowned creatures to whom she was a "case"—who didn't give a hang for her cerebrations so long as these didn't affect the pulse their fingers could feel—had their dignity. Yes, even, she supposed, their ugly instrument for making her sleep, though it didn't appeal to one's æsthetic sense. . . .

"So it's like this, chloroform. I must remember to tell Vincent. He's never taken it." That was the last articulate thought in Rosina Sayle's mind before the anæsthetic conquered both brain and body. She couldn't murmur the words, with that queer thing they were holding over her mouth and nose, but she etched the impression on her brain with a last focussing of her will. "It's like being all centrifugal force—all those electric shocks shooting out from the very centre of me. Most uncomfortable. And why does the surgeon look like a grocer? I could see some sense in his looking like a butcher. I must ask Vincent as soon as ever I get out of this." Then the

THE MIRACLE

chloroform began its sponge-like work upon her brain, and she thought no more. The hours that dragged at a paralytic pace for Vincent Sayle, outside in the big hall, were swept, for her, clean out of life, more absolutely lost out of her existence than the deepest sleep. Rosina Sayle was absent from her own crisis; the competent hands of doctors and nurse took up her life and manœuvred it as if the human clay of poetic hyperbole were clay indeed. She had what to the sensitive creature is the supreme boon of the anæsthetic; by no fault of her own, her most intimate problems were being solved for her without her intervention. Spirit was as grateful as flesh, at the last.

What images pursued each other through Vincent Sayle's mind during that period, Rosina would never know; what tortured memories of Roddy's birth; what strange revisions of mortality and hope; what desperate flinging of his heart upon the new event; what final triumphant concentration of every sense upon her, there in the room beyond, clutched, fought over, held firmly below the tide of consciousness. His period of torture did this for him:

THE MIRACLE

it made any outcome tolerable compared with waiting. Waiting, he faced many conflicting alternatives—tragedies that could not co-exist. Endurance was almost worn out before there was anything actually to endure. So when, after a stretch of time to which the marching hands of his watch bore no relation, Dr. Betts came out of the room and walked towards him, the length of the hall, he felt, for an instant, only relief. Now he should know.

“She’ll do, all right.”

Then what was there to fear, he wondered. And in that instant, before the doctor spoke again, his nerves began clumsily readjusting themselves to the lost rhythm of joy.

“But—I’m mighty sorry, Sayle—we couldn’t save the boy. Dr. Mosher did everything science can do.” And then, hurriedly, he gave technical explanations, out of the confusion of which Vincent Sayle gathered that Rosina would never have a child of her own. The door at the other end of the hall opened, Miss Maddox beckoned the doctor, and Sayle was left with his knowledge.

He rose and walked unsteadily to the window,

THE MIRACLE

whence he looked blankly out over the garden. Pressing his forehead against the pane, he murmured: "Poor kiddy! She'll mind so. It isn't as if she had ever really cared about Roddy." Then, mercifully, Miss Maddox summoned him, and there were again things he could do—little absurd ways in which his hands and feet and brain could serve the devious plan of science.

Roderick Sayle was exiled longer than any one had contemplated. Before he was brought home, even for a visit, he had had time to establish a familiar, an almost traditional, despotism over his aunt's household and reduce the goats to a state of peonage. Sayle went to see him daily, but for weeks there was no talk about Roddy's returning. "A little longer," he whispered each time, behind Roddy's back, to Aunt Pauline. And she would nod before Roddy turned round.

Rosina was gaining strength—the body defying the soul, this time; for she put no ambition into her recovery and refused utterly to interest herself in the details of convalescence.

"You think I ought to shriek with joy when Miss

THE MIRACLE

Maddox tells me I can go for a drive, or have tomatoes in my salad. I'm sorry not to be thrilled; but I'm not, and there's the end of it. Nothing really interests me—except you, dear.” She turned to her husband with a faint smile. “By the way, would you mind burning up that copy of *Holy Dying*? If I should ever come across it again, I should go off my head. Oh, my darling boy”—she hid her face on Sayle's shoulder—“promise me I shall never, never, whatever happens to me, have chloroform or ether again. If I hadn't been drugged out of life, perhaps I could have kissed Vincent once! I think it wouldn't have mattered so much, all my life, if I could just have done that. To think I shouldn't have been there! It's cruel to drown one's mind. What is pain, compared with that?”

“No, dear, no. You mustn't think of it.” Sayle's voice was stern. They had united—and this time he was passionately of the confederacy—in the determination to shroud, forever, the details of Rosina's foredoomed maternity in the merciful anæsthetic mists. If Rosina asked questions, he wouldn't answer them; but he dreaded a spasmodic cross-questioning

THE MIRACLE

through the months to come. It was so difficult not to put everything to Rosina straight.

"Can't you get up a romantic interest in me, dear? Something to keep you going from day to day—to make you want to wake up in the morning?"

She looked him over, listlessly. "No. Perhaps if you went away, I should find it exciting to wait for you to come back. But I think I should just die of it. You're my temperature, and my pulse, and my metabolism—all the normal necessary things without which there wouldn't be any 'me.' But you're not an imaginative interest. My body's doing very well, thank you—ask Miss Maddox if it isn't—but there's something wrong with my soul. I used to think you held it in the hollow of your hand, but you've somehow let it slip. Pick it up at once, careless!"

She smiled, but her eyes were wet.

"I've never dropped it, my dear. Only it's a little bruised, and I'm trying not to hold it too close. Are you coming down for all day to-morrow?"

"Yes. I could have done it a week ago, you know, and I think Miss Maddox resents my not taking

THE MIRACLE

advantage of my privileges. By the way, there's no reason why she should stay on after this week. She's a nice woman, but she's frightfully expensive. And I dare say it would be a good thing for me to take up the detail of life again—order food, and tell the servants what to do, and all the rest. Life has to go on, somehow."

"I think you're right. There's no reason why you shouldn't do anything you like, *within* reason. And a house without a mistress is an inorganic thing." He hesitated. The most crying difference in life, now that Rosina was virtually well again, was Roddy's absence. But she had never mentioned Roddy since the day of the operation, and it became more difficult, daily, for him to speak. The child must come back, but even his father dreaded the day. There was no reason under heaven why Roddy should be made to suffer for all that had come and gone. It was like Rosina not to mention him until she felt sure of doing it in the right tone. But would the right tone ever come? Poor darling, it never had been really right—it had only been beautifully correct. But that she must never know. He sighed.

THE MIRACLE

“Let me look at you!” There was a touch of her old imperiousness in her tone. “Why, Vincent Sayle, you look dead—positively dead! There’s every sort of wrong line in your face, and your eyes are so far back in your head that in a few days they’ll drop down your spinal cord. What a whining egotist I am! As if my cerebrations mattered, while you’re pining under my blind old eyes! Why, I have to take care of you! That’s something for me to do. I’ll come down to dinner to-night.”

Vincent Sayle crushed down his impulse to deny his own weariness. Perhaps it would be better for Rosina to put her mind on him for a little. The doctor had said she might do anything she liked, within reason; and their great trouble had been that there was nothing within or without reason that she had liked to do.

“Good! I have missed you,” and he rose. “Want some one to help you dress? I’ll tell Frances.”

“No, thanks. I’m on the job myself now. I believe I’m actually tired of tea-gowns. We’ll call it a party. I think I’d like to see you drink a cocktail.”

He felt a little reassured as he went down-stairs.

THE MIRACLE

Her last speeches had sounded more like Rosina than anything—since. But still no word of Roddy! He knew that she couldn't have forgotten the child; if she hadn't spoken of him, it was because, for some tragic reason, she couldn't bear to. And yet Roddy must come back. Even Aunt Pauline was beginning to look curious. Besides—he wanted his son.

Mrs. Sayle came down, that evening, in her best frock. She made the dinner, as she so well knew how, a "party"; and if occasionally her eyelids fell and her shoulders drooped, she kept it up, none the less, extraordinarily well. Once or twice Sayle had the amused sense that Rosina was flirting with him—a sense that threw back to almost prehistoric times. He played up as well as he could, though flirtation had never been the *genre* of either of them. He wondered if she was going to try to change her type, by way of creating an interest in life. No good could come of that, he thought—Rosina's temperament did not take easily to anodynes. He was very tired when he said good-night to her; he almost reeled as he paused an instant in her doorway.

"Straight to bed, Vincent," she called, "or I'll

THE MIRACLE

have Dr. Betts for *you* to-morrow. I told Miss Maddox before dinner that she can go as soon as she likes. She's been awfully good to stay, for she badly wants a rest before her next case."

"All right, dear. I think it's safe enough." But as he went into his room he had the desperate feeling that he couldn't face a haunted solitude with Rosina. When Miss Maddox went, that would end the period during which Roddy's absence was plausible. None the less, the fiction of a return to their normal *régime* had quieted his nerves, and he slept soundly.

When he woke the next morning and threw open his shutters, he gave an unhistrionic start. Rosina, in a white dress and a big garden hat, was below his window, picking flowers. His tired face relaxed in a smile. Rosina always lost her head in the garden—she never could learn which flowers were meant to be picked and which were not. Wasn't it like her to be filling her hands with tulips and leaving a riot of pansies untouched? The spectacle made him almost gay, and he hastened to dress and join her.

She faced him, a little later, across the breakfast-table, as naturally as if there had been no interval,

THE MIRACLE

though for months she had breakfasted in her own room.

"I've arranged for a drive this afternoon. Can you come?"

"Yes."

"And I think"—she was very grave now, and her face was drawn—"after we get back, you had better go over and fetch Roderick. I'll telephone to Pauline this morning."

His lips trembled a little as he looked down into his coffee-cup. "Very well, dear. I think that's an excellent plan."

"Do you suppose," she went on, "that we could have some goats for him?"

"Perhaps so. I dare say Pauline would sell us hers, now that Jack has gone to school." His voice was strained.

"I'm afraid he'll miss them dreadfully," she went on, "and—and—I don't want him to miss anything he *can* have."

Then she covered her eyes with her hands, and he saw the tears on her cheeks. He got up and went over to her.

THE MIRACLE

"No, no; it's nothing—nothing," she sobbed. "Go away, dear. And please get him the goats if you can." She rose and went quickly upstairs.

An hour later he found her packing winter things into the cedar closet. "I'm very busy. Don't stay in this hot, smelly place. If I were a moth, I'd keep away from cedar, too." She did not smile. "If you don't mind, I think you'd better go straight to Pauline's and take Roddy to drive instead of me. I'll get a rest this afternoon. I don't want to be done up when I first see Roddy."

"All right." He turned away, biting his lip.

Roderick took his return home with philosophic cheerfulness—especially as it was prefaced by the long drive with his father. He did not seem elated or excited over his home-coming, though he professed an interest in the pigeons.

"Has she been very sick?" That was his only question about his stepmother.

"Very. That's why we had to let you stay away so long."

"And I mustn't make any noise, I suppose."

THE MIRACLE

He spoke in the bored tone of one who had recently made a good deal.

“Not any more than you can help. But, of course, we expect you to make some.” Vincent Sayle’s heart yearned over his son—the son who was, for no reason at all, extraordinarily like Rosina herself, could she only have seen it.

“Mamma wants you to have the goats at home. I think we can manage it.”

“That is good of her,” answered Roderick, quaintly.

“She loves you dearly.”

Vincent Sayle did not know, himself, why he said it. Apparently Roderick did not know, either, for he made no reply. The rest of the drive was filled with five-year-old questions and a deal of chatter.

When they reached the house, Sayle sent Roderick up to Rosina’s room alone. Every nerve in his body warned him not to be present at their meeting. The child went up-stairs, neither laggingly nor in haste—as if he, too, had made up his mind to something. Then all was silence for Vincent Sayle, for he had at once sought his own study in the other wing

THE MIRACLE

of the house. Once there, he sat waiting; he did not even fiddle with his papers or light a cigarette. Roddy would probably be back soon. He rather hoped Rosina would come down with the child, her hand on his shoulder, as she sometimes did. But half an hour went by, and the boy had not reappeared.

"Confound it! It's like waiting for Betts to come out," murmured Sayle to himself. "I'm a fool. I'll go up myself." And he did.

Rosina, in her own room, was sitting in the biggest chair, with Roddy on her lap. The falling lace of her sleeves was all over the child's shoulders. Roddy was turning the leaves of a story-book, but with the irrelevant gesture of the happy child who has to do something with his fingers though his mind is elsewhere. Obviously they were talking, not reading.

Rosina smiled at her husband. "I'm telling Roddy I don't know how we ever got on without him. I don't. It's wonderful to have him back at last." She hid her face for an instant in Roderick's yellow mop of hair, then lifted it and gazed, beyond them both, out of the western window. "Wonderful," she repeated, under her breath. And her clasp

THE MIRACLE

tightened on the child's body. Roderick turned slowly in her arms, then raised his head and kissed her cheek, comfortably and with emphasis.

Sayle stood by her chair with his hand on her shoulder.

"He's so like you," she whispered. "Would you mind if I sometimes, just for myself, called him Vincent? Of course, I wouldn't really take away his own name."

He did not answer, but Rosina felt no need of asking again.

Slowly, as if it were some visibly healing process, relief spread itself over his features. He didn't know how the miracle had been achieved, but there was no mistaking the sudden infusion of spontaneity into voice and gesture. Her arms closed naturally over the strong little body; her lips, of themselves, found new inflections, with a caress in them. She wasn't playing the game—the boy really meant something to her. The kid must be feeling it himself, for that matter—he wasn't the miscellaneously cuddling kind.

"Supper, Roddy." Sayle took out his watch.

THE MIRACLE

"Run to Frances." And the boy went off at top speed, with a high halloo, down the corridor.

Rosina Sayle opened her arms to her husband. "Some time I must tell you a lot of things, Vincent."

"I think I know them."

She scanned his face. "Do you? I wonder. I've been a most remarkable ostrich, if you do. Anyhow, in here"—she tapped her forehead—"there's peace now. Why didn't you have Roddy home before?"

"I didn't dare."

Rosina mused an instant. "I see. You *do* know. I didn't dare, either. Think of Roddy's doing the trick! . . . First"—her voice was very low—"I was afraid I shouldn't care for Vincent; and then, when I knew how I should have cared for him, I was afraid I should hate Roddy. And I had only to touch Roddy—to *feel* him, with my hand and my cheek—to know that nothing of it all had been wasted. I know now how a mother feels. I dare say it took Vincent to teach me. Anyhow, the Sabbath's over."

"The Sabbath?"

"Oh, it's an old phrase of mine. It wouldn't mean anything to you. Other days, other Sabbaths; but

THE MIRACLE

never, I believe, that one again. Perhaps, if my ancestors hadn't insisted on burning so many witches, there would never have to be another."

"You mean—"

"My dear boy, I'm afraid my metaphors will have to be my own. Can't you let it go at possessing the facts—and me?"

"I think I can."

Rosina caught up her skirts with one hand. "I'll race you to the nursery."

"No, you won't." Sayle detained her firmly.

"Oh—I'd forgotten. Do I still have to be careful of myself? Really, Vincent, I quite understand the mystics—always wanting to divorce spirit and flesh. Those two quarrel incessantly. One has always to be subduing one or the other. Oh, for a quiet house! But that, I suppose, is the martial thing called life. Roddy, thank Heaven, hasn't learned it yet."

It was complete, even to the unconscious thrill of maternal jealousy in her voice. He tucked her arm into his, and they paced, in perfect step, along the halls to the nursery.

WESENDONCK

W E S E N D O N C K

MRS. CHADWICK looked up, somewhat annoyed, from the bundle in her lap, which was Jonathan. She was dabbing vaseline in Jonathan's ears with a bit of cotton, and even her earlier practice on Muriel and Reginald had not succeeded in making her deft. Moreover, Jonathan habitually resented it. "Lunch, did you say, Diana? We will have shredded codfish for lunch, and Hamburg steak for dinner. There's codfish in the house, and you can get round steak from the butcher when he calls."

"Two pounds, ma'am?"

Mrs. Chadwick put away the vaseline tube. "A pound and a half will be enough. And you can boil the potatoes for the fish. I'll see about the vegetable for dinner later."

Diana removed herself from the bathroom door. Mrs. Chadwick saw the slatternly young figure go down the stairs. Then she busied herself with dressing Jonathan. Every woman, so ran Sadie Chadwick's

W E S E N D O N C K

conventional reasoning, wanted a child, and, *a fortiori*, every woman wanted a boy; but Muriel and Reginald sufficed. She loved Jonathan quite as much as the others, but he was neither a novelty nor a necessity. She had not even had the satisfaction of calling him Ronald. Her husband had insisted on their second son's being named for his grandfather. A few tears of amply justified self-pity rolled on Jonathan's face as she tucked him into his shabby, inherited carriage. She kissed him, to ease her conscience.

Sadie Chadwick had spent her childhood and youth in Sankeyville, an unimportant Middle-Western town, named originally for Moody's famous co-evangelist. The youth of Sankeyville had its advantages; notably, proximity to the State University. Boys and girls in Sankeyville, if their parents could afford it, left the high school for the university. Sadie had taken her degree on the easiest terms the institution offered. Along with her B.L., the university had unofficially offered her, as was its wont, a fiancé. For Bert Chadwick, in his laboratory, the vision of her had become obsessing; her slim shape

W E S E N D O N C K

wandered among his retorts and test-tubes, the memory of her ylang-ylang overbore the fumes of hydrogen sulphide. Years of teaching school in wide farming districts had intervened between his B.S. and the leisure for his Ph.D.—a leisure, spite of all his toil, not opulent enough for Johns Hopkins—and he had returned from the prairies, full of contempt for the unintellectual woman. Herbert Chadwick was perhaps more dazzled by Sadie's B.L. than was Sadie herself. Sympathy with his work; intelligent allegiance to his scientific ideals; lamplit evenings when they should relax their minds together over Goethe (Sadie was "crazy about" German)—who can tell to what naïve and fatal platitudes Bert Chadwick had succumbed? Some stern streak in him had been propitiated, no doubt, by her degree; and the rest of him was allured by her slim shape and delicate features. No one immediately concerned foresaw that the slenderness would eventually become shapeless, and the features sharp. Muriel, Reginald, and Jonathan—to say nothing of Diana and her kind—would see to that.

But at the time when Sankeyville assembled in the

W E S E N D O N C K

Baptist church to witness this marriage of true minds, it looked as if the Chadwicks might have a gilded future. Sadie Lampson had refused the local sub-editor and one of the younger real-estate agents, to become the authorized and domesticated angel of the test-tubes and retorts. It was possible that Bert's Ph.D. had worked on her imagination as her B.L. had worked on his. But imagination was not destined to be the strongest point of either, though in the first years of their marriage—even after Muriel came—they joked solemnly about Bert's some day achieving the Nobel prize. They ended by joking, when they joked at all, over the possible death of a rich alumnus who should create posthumously a new chair in organic chemistry.

"Then all smiles stopped together." The little Eastern college which overworked Bert Chadwick in the interests of science, and left him only scant Sundays in which to be king of his laboratory (and to take Muriel and Reginald off their mother's hands) was socially bewildering to both. It came to be understood in Eastford that the Chadwicks didn't care about meeting people. Bert Chadwick's seclu-

sion, to be sure, was fitfully illumined by strange cross-lights from the cosmopolitan world of science. Lonely, but not unsignalled or ungreeted, he beat up and down the choppy seas of discovery.

Chadwick, impatient, in the end, of all subjects not his own, took most things for granted—even the children and the exclusively athletic interests of rich alumni—in grim materialistic temper. His sole spiritual extravagance was the passionate exchange of reprints with distant *Fachgenossen*. It would have been hard to say whether he regretted his ignorance of the social phase of Eastford. There were always more immediate worries than that: chicken-pox, or dull students, or the innumerable obstacles to research. The plans he and Sadie had nursed, of European summers and sabbatical years, had been winter-killed by Muriel and Reginald. Jonathan merely reiterated their doom. It was probably inevitable that Bert Chadwick, in his laboratory, should discover moroseness like a new acid.

Moroseness was not easily discoverable to Sadie's temperament: her own researches in life resulted rather in a peevishness that was sharp and shapeless

W E S E N D O N C K

like herself. She had no constructive sense, and the perception of differences between herself and the other "faculty wives" did not lead to successful imitation. In any case, the babies gave her little time for pretense. Bert's Puritanical materialism kept him from church, and Sadie was not the sort to go alone. She went to official receptions and "teas," to prove to herself that her position was as good as Mrs. Percival's; but her clothes at last were dowdy enough to make her glad of Jonathan as a general excuse. She believed in her husband's future; yet as that future deferred itself more and more emphatically, she less and less saw herself sharing it. Some people, in losing heaven, gain earth; but Sadie Chadwick's thin little mind had lost everything together—except the illogical recurring dream of Hell. Hell seemed, all things considered, plausible. She did not mention it to Bert—he would only argue with her. But it gave substance to the moral teachings it was her delicate task to free from the religious taint before instilling them into the children. Mrs. Chadwick was devoid of irony; yet she had once or twice asked herself resentfully how she could possibly tell a child

W E S E N D O N C K

named Jonathan that there was no such thing as God.

This morning, after putting Jonathan to sleep in his carriage, she sat down in the parlor. She had a note to write, refusing an invitation to luncheon. She was seldom asked to lunch nowadays. It was pretty well understood that Mrs. Chadwick never went out. The note, written in a prettily flourished Spencerian hand, was curt. She took pleasure in signing herself "Sadie Lampson Chadwick." Bert had been trying for a year or two to eliminate the "Lampson" and turn her into "Sarah." The note written, she permitted herself to look round the room.

Sadie Chadwick, as she sat in the wicker rocking-chair, looking round her parlor, did not say to herself that life was intolerable, but she came very near feeling it so. The room, now—it was all wrong, and never would be right. It was small and many-windowed, and utterly without grace. Bert had never criticised the room: he had only always refused to sit in it. By gaslight it was rather awful, Sadie confessed to herself. She had come to realize it, not from

W E S E N D O N C K

any sudden æsthetic illumination of her own, but by its positively hypnotizing effect on callers. With the passing of callers her sense of the hypnotizing effect had weakened, but not her resentment. It was abominable—"too mean" was her inward phrasing—that her parlor should be all wrong. Yet she couldn't have done it up to suit herself even if she had been able to afford it. And what did it matter? Bert was at the laboratory every evening, and she sat up-stairs. But if any one thought she was going to accept hospitality that would have to be returned—!

It throws a light on Mrs. Chadwick's mental and physical routine that merely sitting in her parlor from ten to eleven on Wednesday morning gradually marked the hour for her as climactic. She had remained, after writing her note, invaded simply by her general and familiar despair. The anodyne she clutched at, however, was unfamiliar, was "special." She so seldom had time to take things in: life was chiefly a matter of hurrying from one thing to the next. To sit down with empty hands and envisage her situation was as dangerous and historic a thing as Sadie Chadwick could do. She saw the futile,

W E S E N D O N C K

unrepaying hurry of the years before her, mockingly monotonous. Sadie Chadwick was not given to seeing visions, either of hope or of despair. Now, by some odd trick of the slack moment and the released nerves, she saw the morrow, precisely like to-day. There was no way out. Why had she never thought of that before? She positively never had. It had always been: "When Bert is called to a big university," or, "when the children are grown up." Some term, some date, had always laid a shining finger across the straight and melancholy way. Was there really any shining finger? She took a good, hard look, and decided that there was not. Bert had grown critical. He no longer had any faith in her way of doing things, though he had no suggestions to help out with. She knew she was unsuccessful, but there was always something that had to be done, at the very minute, in her own muddling way. She couldn't plot and plan; she couldn't reorganize. All the same, if people thought she would go to their stupid luncheons in clothes of the previous year and conversation of the previous decade, they little knew Sadie Lampson. White, crumpled, nervous, she was

W E S E N D O N C K

like tinder waiting for the match, to flame into a bright and tawdry blaze.

Sadie Chadwick's inflammable hour was destined to its surprising spark. Bert Chadwick—an hour before luncheon—appeared in the parlor doorway. He began, as usual, without preliminaries. The Chadwicks' intercourse was stripped, if not of kindness, certainly of graces. The practical things of life made, for any conversation they indulged in, an eternal gray context.

"Is it Diana's day out to-morrow?"

Mrs. Chadwick, sharply recalled to the context, replied a little fretfully. "Of course, Bert. She always has Thursdays. She wouldn't stay if she didn't."

"Don't the Percivals manage?"

"Their girl can hardly talk English. She hasn't any friends. I daresay Mrs. Percival keeps her in on any excuse. Diana is different."

"Can't you manage for once?"

"What do you want of her? I shall have a fancy brisket boiled to-morrow morning before she goes out. We can eat it cold for supper."

"You see, Monteith's away." (Monteith was the

WESENDONCK

head of the department.) A frown came easily to Bert Chadwick's brows. He stood with his shoulders hunched, his hands in the sagging pockets of his blue serge coat.

"Well?" She got no clue.

"Wesendonck's here. Going to stay over until Friday. He's dining with the president to-night, but to-morrow night I thought we might ask him."

"Wesendonck?"

"Don't you remember?" The nervous frown thickened and deepened. "The big man in physiological chemistry—from Leipsic. He's been in the laboratory all the morning. I cut a class. Wesendonck's more important. He's a great swell. It would be mighty civil to ask him, and I think he'd come. We've been having a lot of talk. You could ask the Opdykes."

"Ask the Opdykes?" Sadie Chadwick's voice was shrill. She didn't understand about this foreign person, but, after all, he was only a foreign person. He might be very grand, but at all events he would go back to Europe. Whereas the Opdykes—! The Opdykes had money of their own; they kept a butler;

WESENDONCK

they spent summers abroad; Mrs. Percival said they were going to have an automobile. Professor Opdyke taught for the love of it. To teach for the love of it was Eastford's *ne plus ultra* of social and mental magnificence. Mrs. Chadwick remembered the insignificant luncheon she had just refused. "Ask the Opdykes?" she repeated. There was almost a thread of raillery in the shrillness. She seemed to herself, in her hold on common sense, immensely superior to Bert.

"Well, why not? They've asked us, and we've never asked them."

"Of course not—and I never intend to."

Bert, too, could be cool. "It's a very good chance—now that we have Wesendonck to ask them to. Opdyke knew him in Vienna. Wesendonck wants to see him, of course, but Opdyke was called to New York Monday, and won't be back till to-night. I thought we could arrange it this afternoon."

"If Professor Opdyke comes back to-night, won't he ask Wesendonck at once himself?"

"Of course he will. That's why I thought we'd better ask them all, ourselves, right after lunch."

W E S E N D O N C K

Her face gave him no adequate response, and he added, flushing a little: "I shall be in the laboratory all the afternoon with him, Sadie. It would be pretty difficult not to ask him."

"Can't you manage—talking shop?" Surely it was the hour of unfamiliar idleness that had given her this courage.

"Not very well. It's the only decent thing to do. It isn't as if I belonged to the Club. And it's really a great thing to have Wesendonck here. We've been talking about that last article of mine."

"You don't expect to talk to the Opdykes about that article, do you?"

"I don't know why we shouldn't sometimes—on a really important occasion—do things like other people. It seems to me it would be throwing a chance away. If you're bothered about Diana, I'll speak to her. I don't believe she'd mind staying in for once."

"She might as well be out as in." Sadie Chadwick, with the breath of battle in her very face, outdid herself in calmness.

"What do you mean?"

W E S E N D O N C K

"I mean that Diana wouldn't know how to wait on the Opdykes."

"Oh, they won't expect much." The statement did little credit to Chadwick's tactical sense. He perceived its effect at least, for he hurried on. "I know she's not clever about it, but she can pass things."

"She can spill them, if that's what you mean."

"She can put them on the table and let us serve them. There's no point in trying to be grand." Chadwick was honestly trying to speak helpfully. But the male instinct for simplicity as a way out is the perennial object of female scorn.

"You don't know what you're talking about. But it isn't only Diana. It's the furniture, the china, the knives and forks, Muriel and Reginald, my clothes—everything! We haven't given a dinner since Reginald was born. We can't possibly do it decently. I don't see how it will do you anything but harm to ask people to such a mess. And this room is all wrong, too. It's dreadful at night."

The shrillness at present had no raillery in it. Sadie Chadwick saw that her husband meant the

W E S E N D O N C K

invitation to be given. It was his house, she reflected, dully. The wife's duty was clear.

Bert's next words defined his attitude. "We can have a very simple dinner. If you have canned soup and get ice-cream from Lawler's, Diana won't have such a lot to do."

"There isn't any one in this house who can dress a salad properly." It was the last wave of the banner before the flimsy folds were trodden underfoot. Even as she spoke she told herself not to forget to order a bottle of mayonnaise at the grocer's. Having surrendered inwardly, she resented the sharpness with which Bert replied to her explicit protest.

"Do the best you can. I don't care what we have. But we must ask the Opdykes."

Sadie shrugged her shoulders. "And the Percivals."

"Oh, you needn't do that, need you? Won't it make it a good deal harder?"

She faced him as she rose. "How else am I to borrow half her china?"

He had no answer for that. After all, he couldn't have expected to make more than his main point. In

W E S E N D O N C K

spite of his determination, he felt a perplexed pity for her. It seemed to make her so much trouble.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But it *is* important. I should like to get into a better laboratory than this. I guess you don't realize how keeping in touch with the big people helps."

"Oh, don't I?" She had no amiability to spare.

"Aren't you going to write to Mrs. Opdyke?"

She did not turn as she went out. "I've got to make Jonathan's formula now. After lunch will be plenty of time. If Wesendonck is such a swell, they'll be sure to come."

Her sarcasm unsealed in him some fount of bitter passion.

"Good heavens, Sadie, can't you see it's for you and the children, too?"

Half-way up the stairs, she heard him, but did not reply. For her and the children! Was there any limit to men's natural egotism? Sadie Chadwick, as has been said, lacked the constructive sense.

The note to Mrs. Opdyke, the jarring consultation with Diana, the compounding of the menu, and the negotiations for Mrs. Percival's best china tired

W E S E N D O N C K

Mrs. Chadwick more than she cared to realize. But she would go on; she would see it through. With Bert, at least, she could perhaps subsist for a time on the virtue thus accumulated. Martyrdom is, domestically speaking, a bank-account of five figures.

Towards the middle of the afternoon Mrs. Chadwick had time to think of her purely personal part in the deplored festivity. Up-stairs in a trunk, underneath the children's winter underclothes, she found her evening dress. It smelled of moth balls, and fell in limp, ugly creases. She remembered how recklessly she had packed it, discarding it passionately and finally, the spring before. The black satin could be aired and pressed, of course; but did the wizard live who could charm the sleeves and the waist into anything like proper shape? She found it difficult to believe that they had ever, within mortal memory, been fashionable. On her knees, the dress spread out before her on the attic floor, she considered. She loathed the task of considering. She loathed Wesendonck for bringing her to it. Above all, she loathed Mrs. Opdyke, who bought dresses in Paris and told how much duty she had paid on them. Yet she

W E S E N D O N C K

choked down her disgust, and at last a flicker of wit pricked light through her despair. A fichu! "I might get chiffon at Carr's. I believe I could sew it on the machine if I put a strip of paper in. I shan't have time to do it all by hand." In such a guise Sadie Chadwick's inspiration came. She went down to her own room. Muriel and Reginald, called in from play, were despatched to Carr's with a note. Jonathan was awake and fretful, and could not be left.

The children brought back the chiffon, quarrelling to the last as to which should carry the slim parcel; and at the end of the long spring afternoon Sadie Chadwick cut and tucked and hemmed and gathered her fichu. After the children were put to bed, she tried it on. It is due to her to say that she had no illusions about it. She saw it for what it was—a makeshift. Mrs. Opdyke and Mrs. Percival would think her taste dowdy and dreary; but they would never know what archaic horrors the simple scarf concealed. The mere consciousness of how much worse it would have been without the fichu must sustain her. Such poor triumphs were all she could know: clumsy mitigations of the unspeakable and the in-

W E S E N D O N C K

tolerable. She did not allow her self-pity to abate; and she went down to dinner consciously grim. The fichu she left in the nursery: she didn't want Bert, seeing it, to suspect that she had found any mitigation possible.

The latent and moribund confidence of Bert Chadwick had been waked and stirred by the stimulating talk in the laboratory with Wesendonck. It was tremendous luck, really, to have Monteith and Opdyke both away when the great man turned up, apt as a miracle, in Eastford. It had been wonderful to feel himself once more in the current; to find himself, in his undisputed laboratory, talking with a distinguished comrade. The note of authority, long mute (something quite different from the didactic condescension with which he addressed his students) crept back into his voice. Leaning easily against the wall, his hands in his pockets, he spoke ringingly. Wesendonck replied in guttural, significant English. The hours had flown. . . . Bert Chadwick was not popular: in the shabby and shy, contempt is not a social asset. Deference, none save the most worshipful could wring from him. To Wesendonck he gave

W E S E N D O N C K

it not ungracefully—the generous deference of the equally enfranchised. Wesendonck was great; as, by the grace of Science, he, Bert Chadwick, might one day be. While Wesendonck, that evening, talked international scandal at the president's house, Bert Chadwick moved alertly among his test-tubes.

He came home very late. Sadie was asleep, and he was careful not to wake her. In his exalted mood, her head on the pillow looked to him astonishingly irrelevant, but he did not trouble to reason her back into the scheme of things. After his long exhilaration, he slept.

He was still sleeping when Sadie got up to give Jonathan his six-o'clock bottle. She moved about quietly. Jonathan cried a little, but went to sleep as soon as he had taken his eight ounces. Mrs. Chadwick heard Muriel in the nursery, and went to caution her against waking her father. To her surprise she found the child weeping. "Sh—sh! What is it?" she murmured, mechanically, as she crossed to the little bed which shook with the child's sobs. Muriel unwound her doll from folds of chiffon. "It blew on to my paint-box in the night," she explained, "and

W E S E N D O N C K

got all spotty; and I took it for Henrietta, 'cause it wasn't any good any more, and it sticks to her face."

Sadie Chadwick looked down at the fichu. It was spotty, as Muriel said; and had stuck to the wax face of Henrietta, as Muriel complained. Moreover, the adventure had reduced it to a satiric crumple.

Mrs. Chadwick, drawing her dressing-gown close about her, stared very quietly at the fichu.

Was it any good any more? Muriel asked, anxiously. She displayed the red and blue smudges. Her own fingers had multiplied them all over the delicate fabric. But obviously hers had not been the first sin.

No; it wasn't any good any more. Sadie Chadwick did not lose her temper with the child. She was far too deeply stirred for that. She referred the mishap to something greater and more inexorable—something very like Fate. She did not mind so much about the fichu. She had been foolish to think that the mere futile garnishing of an ancient frock would enable her to put through this preposterous dinner-party. She had been weak—she had been idiotic—to think for a moment that she could, on the strength

W E S E N D O N C K

of one mitigating detail, put it through. A hundred fichus—a whole new dress!—would not have sufficed for success. Could she fling one chiffon scarf over Diana, the eked-out china, the bad pictures, and the intolerant eyes of Mrs. Opdyke? It spoke for some belated strength in Sadie Chadwick that she did not lose her hold on herself. Hysteria would have been one way, and she nearly took that road; but she was beginning, in the fresh light of the April dawn, to see a solution compared with which hysteria would be a miserable mock relief, a brief, ineffectual respite. Almost consciously, she renounced emotion and held her nerves taut.

Sadie Chadwick did not go back to bed. She dressed, swiftly and carefully. Then she made Jonathan's formula for the day. Before calling her husband, she gave Muriel and Reginald their breakfast and sent them out to play. She breakfasted this morning with them; and she took her coffee without cream and, contrary to her frugal habit, ate two eggs. When Chadwick came down to breakfast, he found the table cleared, except for his own place; and Sadie was in the parlor at her desk. He noticed

W E S E N D O N C K

that she stuffed something into her blouse as he came into the room, but she rose at once and went into the kitchen to make sure that his coffee was hot. As she came back through the dining-room with an armful of clean things for Jonathan, she smiled at him, but did not stop to talk. She was still upstairs when he called to her.

“Good-bye, Sadie. I’m going. I’ve got to make up that lecture I missed.”

Mrs. Chadwick came down as he went out of the door. She did not kiss him, but she stood looking after him for a few minutes as he strode off with unwonted liveliness towards the campus. He had been invited to lunch at the little Country Club—still with Wesendonck; but he had promised to come home early to take care of Reginald and Muriel. She reflected unrelentingly that he was very dear to her. Her hand went to her side for an instant, and she found an unexpected bulge in her blouse. She remembered at once what it was, and drew out the packet she had tucked away: a time-table and a thin book inscribed “Eastford Savings Bank, in account with Reginald Chadwick: Sarah L. Chadwick,

W E S E N D O N C K

Trustee." It struck her that her mother, in bestowing the little sum, had hardly thought of this.

No baby has ever been more hastily prepared for a longish railway journey than was Jonathan on the day when Mrs. Chadwick decided that actual flight was her only escape from the Wesendonck dinner-party. Like most people, Sarah Chadwick had heard the adjective "intolerable" applied to many things that afterward had been endured to the full. What she had realized that morning in the nursery was simply the real meaning of the word. The thing she had to face was the thing literally, not hyperbolically, intolerable—the thing that could not be borne. It came to her with immense simplicity: when you cannot bear a thing, you do not have to.

She did not stop, all the swift morning, for analysis or reconsideration. For the first time since she had accepted Herbert Chadwick, she made a quick, irrevocable decision. Even as on that earlier occasion she had at once eliminated from her musings the editor and the real-estate agent, so, this morning, she had put away all thought of compromise. There was something fine—some tiny residuum of fineness,

W E S E N D O N C K

at least—in the sudden single-mindedness of this woman. Her moral nature, for years, had dealt only with means. It was astonishing how different it was to concern oneself only with the end; astonishing, after living in a muddle of alternatives to find, step by step, only one possible, concrete thing to do. She had packed the only empty trunk; she had taken the only money she could possess herself of; she had maintained the only possible attitude to Diana, which was not to explain. Her one stratagem in the whole bitter business had been to send Diana out on an errand when the expressman came for the luggage. Late in the morning she had dressed Jonathan in such outdoor finery as he had, and had wheeled him in his carriage to the station. She had, of course, left a note for Bert. It had all been very terrible, yet laughably simple.

At ease in the Pullman, with Jonathan asleep in the opposite seat, she congratulated herself on her courage. It still seemed to her that she had done the only thing possible; but she realized that, could she have foreseen the situation, she should have expected herself to falter. She had no plans; she did not expect

W E S E N D O N C K

to make any. She had not telegraphed to her mother, because it was cheaper to telegraph from Chicago; but her mother would be glad to see her even on short notice. It did not occur to Sadie Chadwick that she was doing anything to endanger her future happiness. She was not running away from Bert: she was running away only from the intruding monster, Wesendonck. She would be quite willing to go home after a few days in Sankeyville. She did not even, as the train swung across the twilit, lake-spotted country, wonder feverishly how Bert was getting out of it all. Invention had been granted her when the case had actually become desperate; as much, undoubtedly, would be vouchsafed to him. Her note had been brief: there had not been room in it for the smallest hint of recrimination or complaint. She had stated baldly what she had done and why—a mere sentence or two—and had signed herself, “Lovingly, Sadie.”

She thought once of the fichu, and smiled. She had been a fool. It seemed incredible that only twenty-four hours ago a fichu had seemed a solution; that only yesterday she had actually intended to preside over her own downfall. For still she saw with

W E S E N D O N C K

unmerciful clearness every crude anticipated detail, every minor disaster that would have befallen. She could still suffer, in imagination, from the general sordid effect of what was to have been. She was sorry for Bert; she wished she did not feel so sure that he would think it wrong to lie about her action; she would have liked to kiss Muriel and Reginald good-night. But she was still utterly justified in her own eyes. Hugging Jonathan a little closer, she went straightway to sleep.

Her first doubts came later, in Sankeyville, when, a little tired by travel with the unsophisticated Jonathan, she explained to her mother and sister. Mrs. Lampson was easy-going; but her widowed daughter, Sadie's sister Alberta, was not. Alberta had always taken everything hard, and she objected chronically to other people's taking things easily. Her short married life had been full of minor woes; her widowhood was a major woe that she never allowed any one to forget. Sadie found that she rather dreaded Alberta: she expected that Alberta would feel that she ought to have done something different. For a moment, as she drove up to the house, she

W E S E N D O N C K

wondered if she could not present herself as wholly a creature of impulse, but realized at once that she could not. It was not in the Chadwicks' humble tradition to run back and forth in Pullman cars between Eastford and Sankeyville. No; she would have to explain. She clutched Jonathan very tightly as she walked up the path to the front porch.

After a fashion, in the first hours—though they were not an articulate group—she managed to tell her story. She could not explain her calmness to Alberta, or the Opdykes to her mother; but Alberta took the Opdykes at once under the broad, black wing of her resentment, and Mrs. Lampson found it perfectly natural for any one, in any circumstances, to be calm. Both women seemed to Sadie absurdly concerned about Bert's attitude. Her mother inquired anxiously if he wouldn't be dreadfully put about; and Alberta appeared to look on Reginald and Muriel in the light of hostages unwisely left behind. Neither one saw it wholly as she had seen it.

"You keep a girl, don't you, dearie? Then I should think you could have had anybody in, without having to worry." This was her mother.

W E S E N D O N C K

"I don't say you weren't dreadfully tried, Sadie, or that you didn't do right to resent it. But do you suppose you can ever make it up with Bert? If he shouldn't keep the children, I don't see how mother *could* have you all." This was her sister.

"Don't worry," she replied, in both cases. "It'll be all right. And, for goodness' sake, let's not talk about it any longer. I want to forget about Eastford for a few days. I shall have to go back before long."

Yet less and less, as she renewed acquaintance with Sankeyville, could she forget Eastford. If Eastford had spoiled things for Sadie Chadwick, it had spoiled Sankeyville first of all. She almost wondered how she could have thought her own parlor so bad—her mother's was so much worse. Her weak, blue eyes (they had troubled her a good deal ever since Reginald's birth) ached with the huge flowers that sprawled over the chair coverings, the Brussels carpet, and the coarse lace curtains—rank, florid things that could grow in the least propitious soil. She had not intended to give Herr Wesendonck an *entrée*, but she wondered if her mother and Alberta knew what an *entrée* was. It was quite clear that they

W E S E N D O N C K

didn't, for all her elucidations—she plagiarized Bert without a pang—understand Wesendonck's importance. Sadie had always been the intellectual one of the family. Sometimes, of late years, that reputation had struck her as ironic; but she realized now that it was quite deserved. Exiled in Eastford, she had thought of Sankeyville, somewhat sentimentally, as "progressive." She was forced to perceive that it had not lived up to its magnificent Middle-Western privilege of inordinate growth. It had not even kept abreast; it had fallen behind. Life had ebbed from its streets; the talk she remembered as so vivacious was a futile clack. Sankeyville hadn't had luck. Its middle age was as disillusioning as her own.

Mrs. Chadwick kept very quiet, seeing people as little as possible. She could not answer questions as to how long she was going to stay, and those were always the first questions asked. She had looked a little for a telegram from Bert; but she had not been really surprised at not getting it. Then she had looked for a letter; but after a week no letter had come. It was perfectly clear to her at the end of ten

W E S E N D O N C K

days that Bert didn't intend to write. Alberta's portentous and sad head-shake, her mother's subdued and shy "tchk-tchk" after each unsatisfactory call from the postman, irritated her, made her apprehensive as she had not intended to be. Her self-confidence ebbed. She shed a good many tears—tears that still angered her, though Alberta, on principle, approved of them. She had discovered only lately the existence of crucial moments, moments as crucial, if not as romantic, as those she read about in novels. At the end of a fortnight in Sankeyville, she rediscovered the immense importance of the immediate future: that future of which, day by day, the present finds itself compounded. Why had she ever doubted it? She had taken her stand; and now life was left. Sometimes, she reflected, the novels were misleading. Perhaps the fault was hers. But whoever was at fault, life was left. In any case, she could not live longer without knowing how things were at home. Suppose Diana had left! Suppose Muriel or Reginald were sick! It was as intolerable—as acute, even—as Wesendonck had been.

"I am going back to-morrow," she announced to

W E S E N D O N C K

her mother and Alberta one night after putting Jonathan to bed.

"It's been real nice to have you, dearie," said her mother, "but I suppose you do feel you must get home."

"Bert must be pretty mad, not writing you," affirmed Alberta. "I'm sorry, but it does seem the only safe thing to do. They get divorces so easily now. Lulu Westlake was asking this morning if you'd had any trouble, you looked so run down."

"I hope you snubbed her." Sadie spoke sharply, through her tears.

"I told her you found your social duties so exacting you ran out here for a rest."

For a moment the three communed silently in the solidarity of sex and kinship.

"Perhaps Bert's been too busy to write," suggested Mrs. Lampson. "He must have a lot of extra care with the children, and help isn't much good, white or colored."

"I don't think it's that," Bert's wife said, slowly. "I expect he didn't know what to say. Probably he expected me to write."

W E S E N D O N C K

“Men are all unreasonable,” averred Alberta—
“the best of them. George was. But a woman has to put up with it. I suppose the sooner you do go, now, the better you’ll feel. But I wouldn’t knuckle under about those Opdykes if I was you, Sadie Lampson. You’re as good as anybody else. It’s my opinion all Easterners are pretty stuck-up. Don’t you forget it’s a free country, though. I’ve had as much trouble as any one in the family, but, if I do say it, I’ve always shown a proper pride. Mother’d let herself be walked over any day.”

“Not as long as you were in the house, Alberta,” Mrs. Lampson laughed. “But what sister says is true, Sadie. You are as good as anybody. Mrs. Westlake said, only last winter, she thought you and Bert had the prettiest wedding that was ever performed in the Baptist church.”

“Speaking of church,” went on Alberta, “I think it’s dreadful that Sadie and Bert don’t go. I call it godlessness.”

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘godlessness,’ ” broke in Sadie; “but I’m sure it has nothing to do with Bert.”

W E S E N D O N C K

From this point she permitted the discussion to go on over her head. It was perfectly clear that they weren't like her; that they couldn't understand. Even Bert understood better than they did. Her brain was occupied with planning details. She would catch the night express at Chicago. She ought to get to Eastford in time to put the children to bed before dinner.

It was not without a tremor that she alighted from the train at Eastford. She had not announced her return, any more than she had announced her departure. The train had been late, and as she went up the steps of the house she almost found her lips opening to apologize for delaying dinner. It was incredible that she had ever been away. She could hardly brace herself again to the fears that had nerved her through the journey. Her husband met her in the hall, and she saw Diana moving about in the dining-room.

"Sh-sh! He's sleepy, and I must get him to bed right off." She pointed at the drowsy Jonathan, and went up the familiar stairs. She caught her breath as she went into the nursery. Yes; both heads were

W E S E N D O N C K

there, safe on the little pillows. In the rush of relief she seemed to herself to be victorious—over what, she did not quite know. Only after she had tucked Jonathan away with his bottle did she realize that Bert had not come up-stairs. It was Diana who had brought up the travelling refrigerator and set it outside the nursery door.

Sadie Chadwick went into her own room and looked at herself in the mirror. Her somewhat muddy pallor, her bleak little features, the wan spaces under the light-blue eyes, the unmanageable straightness of her hair, were perfectly clear to her, with all their implications and prophecies. She wished she were pretty, but underneath her wistfulness lay a more or less definite determination not to let herself be injured by her lack of wiles and graces. Bert had taken her; and he had made her what she was. Life had been merely his collaborator. He would have to deal with her as she had become. She knew that she had been as glad to escape from Sankeyville as, two weeks before, she had been to escape from Eastford. She could feel still the sharp stab of joy at seeing with her own apprehensive eyes those two

W E S E N D O N C K

heads safe on their pillows. In the very moment of her supreme protest she had said to herself that Bert was incomparably dear to her. But that she had been wrong in running away she would never, for sanity's very sake, admit to herself or her husband. She went down-stairs.

The Chadwicks had little conversation at dinner. Bert asked a few questions about her mother and sister and the train she had taken. They rose with relief from their rice-pudding and went into the parlor. Sadie's eyes flitted nervously from object to object. Bert fiddled with a cigarette as he walked about the room.

"Are Muriel and Reginald all right?" She had to ask it, notwithstanding the vision she had had.

"Muriel's well enough. The doctor says Reggie has adenoids. He'll have to be operated on."

"Oh!" Then she went on. "It's not a serious operation, is it?"

"Not in his case. But it means a specialist. It will be fairly expensive."

"Can we afford it?"

Chadwick shrugged his shoulders. "I don't like

W E S E N D O N C K

to wait—after what the doctor said—till the next college cheque comes in. I thought, since it was Reggie himself, we might take it out of his savings-bank account. I hate to do it, but the kid's not getting on as he ought, and if we're careful we can make it up during the year."

Sadie Chadwick clutched the arms of her chair. They gave her only the senseless support of inanimate things. Bert didn't even know she had taken Reggie's money! A sickening vision of all that remained to be said between them gave her once again—but this time without redress—the sense of the intolerable. By main force—as if she were pulling herself up to it, hand over hand, in a high sea—she got herself to the point. Bert, opposite her, was leaning back in a Morris chair.

"I took Reggie's money to go to Sankeyville." She ached in every fibre with passionate maternal regret; but she did not say she was sorry, with all the implications of that.

"Oh, I wondered . . . but I never thought of that. It never occurred to me that you'd take Reggie's money. Well—I'll see Doctor Clay again."

W E S E N D O N C K

She nodded. She was back now, and she would help. Life had caught her; there was no way out: she would have to help.

"You didn't write to me. I got dreadfully worried about you and the children." If he wouldn't attack it, she would.

"How could I write about a thing like that? I didn't understand. You hadn't said anything. You just cleared out."

"I left a note."

"You didn't expect me to make sense out of that note?"

"I needn't have expected you to make sense out of anything." She could not resist that weak retort.

Bert Chadwick's frown thickened. "I didn't think you would understand anything I might write."

Sadie laughed a little. Then she began rocking jerkily. "We're on the same terms, then." She was silent for a moment. If Bert would only stop frowning—if he would only sit in another chair! It was all so hypnotizingly familiar. . . . "How did you manage?"

W E S E N D O N C K

"I don't think I managed. I telephoned the Opdykes and Percivals that you had gone away."

"Didn't you say 'called' away?"

"You didn't say you had been 'called.' I think I said 'gone—unexpectedly.' I don't remember just what words I used."

"You could have said that mother was sick."

"I suppose I could if I'd thought. Lies don't come to me very easily. You knew that before. If you wanted any lies told, it would have been safer to tell them yourself."

"What about Wesendonck?"

"I sent him a note by the laboratory boy. The Opdykes had him to dinner."

"Didn't they ask you?" she flared.

"Yes."

"And you didn't go?"

"Reggie had a cough. He had taken cold in the afternoon. Besides—I shouldn't have gone, anyway."

"I don't see why not."

"I daresay you don't."

"Didn't you see Wesendonck again?"

"No."

W E S E N D O N C K

"He never looked you up in the laboratory?"

"I don't know. I stayed at home purposely. I didn't want to see him. I didn't want to see any one. It was all too damned uncomfortable."

"You could have made up anything about me."

"Perhaps I could if I had had more time—though I should hardly have known what lie would hold water later on. You took pretty good care not to give me anything to go on. But the fact is, I was pretty well bowled over. I didn't know what was back of it all."

"I told you in my note. There was nothing back of it all. I just couldn't bear it, and I went away."

"There must have been something back of it. You don't suppose women do that kind of dirty trick every day, do you?"

Her eyes filled. "It wasn't a dirty trick! How can you? You had put me in a position I couldn't bear. I had said as much as I could, and you paid no attention—you just went on planning."

"Well, if I put you in a bad position, I guess you got back at me." The words might sound light, but each carried a dead weight of bitterness.

WESENDONCK

In a moment Chadwick rose. "Are you going to be here this evening?"

"Of course." She stared.

"I didn't know what your plans might be." He paused a minute, giving his clumsy shaft time to find its mark. "If you are, I think I'll go to the laboratory. I haven't had so much time as usual the last two weeks, and the note-books have piled up pretty badly. I ought to get at them."

She made no protest.

He turned in the doorway. "Monteith came back, right after you left. He has been called to Streatham. That's where he had been that week. He's going, naturally."

Sadie looked up with light in her eyes. "Who takes his place?"

"It isn't absolutely decided, of course, but I believe they're going to ask a very good man from Germany: some one Wesendonck suggested—a young fellow."

"—Wesendonck suggested?"

"Oh, Opdyke probably knew about Monteith and Streatham before Wesendonck left. Very likely they consulted him."

W E S E N D O N C K

“I should think Wesendonck would have seen the place would naturally go to you—if he’d had so much talk with you.”

Bert Chadwick turned to go. “Perhaps he didn’t have enough.”

She heard the front door slam behind him.

Long before Bert Chadwick returned from his laboratory, Sadie slept, from utter weariness. She had discovered that sometimes the intolerable must be borne.

LEDA AND THE SWAN

LEDA AND THE SWAN

THE doctor had been no more disheartening than usual; but it was disheartening enough to know that he would have to come and come, and that there would never be any good news for him to bring. Marie Farrant had learned both to welcome and to dread his firm tread across the floor of their little sitting-room. She welcomed any break—any hint in her husband's sick-room that such sick-rooms were not the whole of life, that there were people who came and went, in health if not in leisure. At the same time, she dreaded each day's confirmation of the fact that her husband would never get well. The doctor's firm tread seemed to reiterate Leo's doom. The six steps across the sitting-room to the bedroom had always the same cadence, were like one grave sentence daily repeated, in precisely the same words. And you paid, too, for the repeated phrase: paid, relatively if not absolutely, as if it had been a famous aria of a famous tenor, rising nightly

LEDA AND THE SWAN

behind footlights. It was overfamiliar; there was never a new word, though apparently the case was so bad that the old ones had to be said often; it was all a part of the technique of slow dying. Leo Farrant himself had no hope. Even before this last malady had come upon him, he had had none. Hope had forsaken the middle-aged painter with the accident that had lost him his right hand and arm. Thanks to a frightened horse, a precious limb had gone to the scrap-heap—as precious, Marie Farrant had thought, as any saint's bones hoarded in a jewelled reliquary. Only, Farrant's hand, cut off from the guidance of his brain and eye, could, naturally, work no miracles. He had begun to die, she often thought, back there, when it all happened. What with the nervous breakdown after the accident, there hadn't been any life in him, to call life, for five years; though even now he was, as periods are estimated, in a noble prime.

With Farrant's fame increasing, and his pictures selling better and better, there had been no need for them to save money—and they hadn't saved. They had ridden the crest of their wave; perhaps

LEDA AND THE SWAN

because they knew the ways of waves, perhaps because they fancied that it was something bigger than a wave—a tide, a sea—that carried them so lightly and triumphantly onward. Mrs. Farrant's first act, after the operation, had been to liquidate all debts—precisely as if he had died. They had been paid, as the future bills were to be, from her own little capital. Now, towards the end, she could only wonder if her balance would hold out until he died. There was nothing she could do to earn money; she could only hypothetically save it by nursing him herself, day and night. He didn't know how close they were to nothing at all; and she thanked God their friends didn't. She had paid without questioning bills that had been incurred in their tempestuous and lavish period—even bills that might have been challenged; she had hunted up every last scrap of an indebtedness and discharged it fantastically—literally, in one or two cases, compounding the interest on an old loan of ten pounds in impoverished bachelor days. She had tracked and snared, she believed, the last and least of them. Now there was nothing left—so little, at least, that the phrase which the doctor's firm

LEDA AND THE SWAN

tread reiterated for her sounded often like the mere naming of his fee. She added up his visits, in naked figures, on her calendar; she did all her purchasing on a cash basis; she paid their landlady weekly. Marie Farrant believed there would be enough to see Leo through the six months the doctor thought he might live; but she could not have borne it not to know, each night, where they stood financially. To have been vague about the smallest account would have given her a nervous chill.

To-day the doctor had prescribed an expensive drug; and, when she could leave Leo for a moment, she took out her bank-book and calculated. She hated to withdraw one penny before interest-day. Not that it mattered—the interest on that dwindling principal; yet she had a superstition to the effect that if she neglected one contrivance, one expedient, of poverty, disaster would somehow be justified. She knew that nothing was more probable than disaster; but she didn't want to tax herself, in stricken future days, with having lifted a finger to invite it. One superstition, finally, got the better of the other: she would let the druggist "charge" it, and after the

LEDA AND THE SWAN

1st she would pay him. She put up the cheque-book and went back to Leo.

Any one seeing Leo Farrant high against his pillows would have noted that he was very handsome, very keen, and very ill. His chestnut hair was dusted over with silver; his lean brown face had paled lifelessly in long confinement; he was wasted with his malady. Yet none of the old signs had gone; and, looking at him for the first time, you could have guessed all that he had been. His wife, tired though she was, glowed to her finger-tips with the sense of his rarity. It had been to keep that sense undefiled that she had paid off so munificently everything that could conceivably constitute a claim on him, that she now slaved over their mean little accounts so that no one should ever have to know how hard up Leo Farrant was. When, after the accident, he had wondered, before her, if there weren't something he could "do," she had cried out against the notion. He had done one thing supremely well; if Heaven had taken away his means of doing that, it wasn't up to him to cast about for lesser ways of serving Heaven. They had given up their house, sold most

LEDA AND THE SWAN

of their possessions, and, after a vain interval at a sanatorium, had come to Mrs. Bleeker's to live in two rooms with an attic above them for storage. They had been meek enough for righteousness; she wasn't going to be meeker than that! She had been rewarded by being able to keep the sense of him as a creature afflicted from without but unconsumed from within. He was as magnificent as ever, bar what the gods had done to him. No one should remember him—she clutched the determination to her heart afresh—as anything but what he really was. He should go down grandly to the tomb, aware of what he was good for, and disdaining to try anything else.

“I have to go out and get this prescription for you, Leo. Can you spare me for twenty minutes? The bell is just by your hand.”

“Spare you? Yes, my dear, always, if I have to.” Then he looked at her—diffidently, if a creature of his mould could be diffident. “I say, Marie, that stuff—what's its name?—is very dear, isn't it?”

She smiled. “What in the world should have set

LEDA AND THE SWAN

you to counting pence? I count them; and you can count on me. We can afford anything you need. Certainly, if we had got to the point where you couldn't have medicines, I think you'd see it in my face."

He smoothed the counterpane with his deft fingers—fingers that had matched so well, for beauty, the fingers they could not match for skill. "Well, if you insist on it, I think I do see it in your face. The lines are as beautiful as ever, but—you've aged. There are two gray hairs over your right temple. I wish you'd give me some notion of how much we have left. His damned medicine won't do me any *good*, you know."

"Did he tell you that?"

"The doctor? He never tells me anything, of course. He's perfectly good form."

"He told me it might help."

"In what sense?"

"My dear"—she looked him straight in the eyes—"you know there's only one sense I think of: the sense of making you more comfortable."

"You mean there isn't any ultimate hope?"

LEDA AND THE SWAN

"What is the hope any living creature has, except the hope of being comfortable a little longer instead of a little shorter time?" She asked it very gravely; and he was wise enough not to mistake it for an evasion.

"You're a brick, Marie; I'll say that for you, any day. Of course, we know, both of us, that there isn't much hope. If a miracle turns up, we'll meet it standing, in perfectly good order. We won't crane our necks for it, will we, any more than we do for the other thing? But, all the same, how much have we got?"

Marie Farrant smiled again at her husband. "Leo, why did you give me a power of attorney four years ago?"

"Because I couldn't stand the look of my left-handed scrawl."

"Not a bit of it. You gave it to me because you knew that I would manage better than you could. Well, I've done it: I've managed marvellously. We can afford quarts of this medicine if it's necessary. Of course, it's obvious that, if we were rich, we shouldn't be living as we are. But we shall do very

LEDA AND THE SWAN

well, if you won't worry. We don't owe any one a penny. Does that satisfy you?"

"Not quite." He shifted himself on his pillows, with a sudden involuntary muscular contraction. Pain, of course—she knew it. Mrs. Farrant laid the prescription on a table, and sat down in a chair beside the bed. "You don't need that until night, anyhow. I won't go out now. We'll lay this little fretful ghost."

The stab of pain had gone as suddenly as it had come, leaving an exquisite sensation of relief. Mrs. Farrant knew, from the slight motion of his features, as well as if she were bearing it herself. She took his hand in hers. "What is it, dear?"

He was weaker and whiter, for an instant, than he had been before; but his voice was fairly strong.

"It's only that I let everything go after this happened. As we both know, I wasn't fit for anything. I didn't attempt to straighten things out, really. I haven't an idea how my debts and assets finally came out. Then you took everything over, and we've gone along swimmingly. Only—I've been afraid, for months, that we were living on your money. I haven't

LEDA AND THE SWAN

liked to speak of it; but it's so evident I shan't last much longer that I'd like to talk it over once with you."

"Well: even if we had been living on what you call my money, what difference would that make?"

"The difference, dear, that I shouldn't have the luxury of feeling at peace about your future."

"Do you mean that, if you knew I had a sufficient income, you would feel at peace about my future?"

He could not, with those eyes looking firmly into his, descend to brutal conventionalities. "You know what I mean, dear. At peace, in the sense that I should know you could afford to hide your hurt wherever you liked."

"I give you my word of honor that, if you do leave me, I shall be able to do that."

He smiled at her, visibly relieved. Then he saw what sense might be read into her words. "I don't mean that, Marie. Why, even I don't want to die."

She stirred a little. "That is magnificent of you. Or do you mean only that you don't want to leave me by myself?"

LEDA AND THE SWAN

"That, above all. But I mean it otherwise, too. I don't want to turn my back on beauty."

They had never shirked analysis. "Ah, my dear, for all the beauty you see nowadays!" She looked round the sick-room.

"I don't mean that. My eyes have seen enough in their time—too much, I sometimes think; for I can remember the individual sneer of every damned Gothic gargoyle I ever saw—and the hand is gone." He glanced involuntarily at the limp sleeve of his pajama jacket.

"You wouldn't have touched a Gothic gargoyle, even to caricature it, and you well know it," she broke in.

"Humph—yes. Forgive my splenetic illustration. I only intended to say that I could lie here and remember, with my eyes shut, enough beauty to keep me going until I was ninety. What I meant by beauty is something quite different."

"Love?"

"Love? Oh, love, my dear! How many people have really known it since the world began? Love's a special case. No, I mean the sheer beauty of con-

LEDA AND THE SWAN

sciousness—the miracle of human intelligence, pure and simple. That is the loveliest phenomenon of the cosmos. What luck to have had it for a little while! To feel oneself think—even pain can't utterly destroy the good of that. I'd rather think as a lunatic than not think at all. One hates to turn one's back on it—to put down the cup for good and all."

"You know I don't agree with you about that, Leo."

"No—I know. You keep a religion going somewhere. I suppose the reason why it has never made any difference between us is that, if you're right, why, I'm in unexpected luck; and if I'm right—bless your heart, you'll never even know it, so you won't mind." He was silent for a moment. "Is there anything left in the studio that one could sell?"

She shook her head. "I don't think so."

"I wish I could get up there and see." He frowned slightly. "I've never been there, you know; and I don't know just what there is."

"Ah, my dear—for all it is! An attic with a skylight, full of old boxes. There are some sketches, but

LEDA AND THE SWAN

I don't think a salable thing. Besides—aren't you going to let me keep anything?"

"You have 'Leda and the Swan.' How I'd like to see it again! That, in the nature of things, can't be sold."

"I couldn't bring it down, dear, very well."

"No. . . . Two men could, I suppose."

She set her lips firmly. "If you want to see it so much as that——"

"Oh, I don't. I don't. But I've never done anything better—thanks to you. What shall you do with it—afterwards?"

"What could I do with it—afterwards—except just keep it for the pure pleasure of knowing that Farrant's masterpiece is all my own? Kings would be jealous of me. It will be my one pride."

"Thank you. I'm not so big as all that, my dear——"

"Oh, yes, you are!" she broke in.

"—but as I remember it, it was my high-water mark. It had a touch of the first-rate, anyhow."

"It's a wonder, Leo. I wish, for your sake, it weren't I."

LEDA AND THE SWAN

“Why for my sake?”

“Because you could sell it for nearly anything, and you would know that it hung in some place of honor.”

“Thank you. If it hadn’t been you, it would never have been. Do you suppose I could have got Leda from any model I ever saw? I needed your face as much as I needed your figure, remember. And any place you hang it will be the place of highest honor. Of course, after you die——”

“What then?”

“Would you mind”—he did not apologize for asking her so tremendous a question—“its going to the Museum?”

Marie Farrant considered (or affected to consider) the matter slowly, without a blush, with a beautiful little judicial air. “Leo, if your name weren’t made; if you weren’t already admittedly first-rate; if the world had to be shown what you are——” She broke off.

“All right. I see. You wouldn’t want it.”

“It might be a photograph.” She smiled painfully.

“Oh, no, it mightn’t. Don’t insult me. It might

LEDA AND THE SWAN

be a Giorgione—if there were any.” He spoke listlessly, without pride. “But it’s you—you all over.”

“Yes, it’s I all over.”

“And you’re afraid——”

“I’m afraid of nothing!” She denied it with energy. “But can’t we be just as magnificent as that?”

“As what?”

“As to let one of your best pictures——”

“My very best,” he amended.

“—have been for us alone—a luxury that no one else will ever have had? Mayn’t we keep one shred of your genius in the most beautiful place of all—just closed away forever with our love? The ‘Leda’ seems to me as intimate as—as whatever we’ve ever had that was most intimate.” She dropped, in sight of her metaphor.

“Your father would have called you squeamish, Marie.” He did not often invoke the unhappy genius in whose studio they had met, chaperoned by the whole Greek pantheon in clay.

“If you can’t see it’s something other than squeamishness, I’ll leave it to any one you say.”

LEDA AND THE SWAN

"I can see. You mustn't blame me too much. It was only an idea thrown out. What is up there, then?"

"There are the Tuscan sketches."

"Um—yes. I haven't seen them for years. You might let Mannheimer have a look at them, if you don't mind. My salad days and all, but there's this about losing your working arm: it gives you the market value of death. If you'd rather ask Showalter to look at them first——"

"I'd much rather not. We've kept any of your friends from knowing we needed money. And, in that sense, we don't."

"You mean my time is very short? But, even so, we need every penny we can scrape together. I'm sure of that. There's you, after all, my dear."

"I don't come into it. Besides, there's quite enough. If you want Mannheimer to look at them, I'll send for him. But I'd rather not take Mr. Showalter up."

"You're confoundedly proud, Marie."

"You've made me so, then."

"All right—all right." His eyes were closed. "I'm

LEDA AND THE SWAN

pretty tired. It is more tiring to talk than to think. It used not to be so. I must be going fast."

Mrs. Farrant rose. "I'll call Minnie to sit in the next room, while I go for your prescription. Mrs. Bleeker is always glad to let her. I'll be back soon." She put on her hat, kissed him, and left the room.

Leo Farrant, that night, in spite of the precious drug, had a turn for the worse. The doctor was summoned before dawn, and when, in the middle of the morning, he came again, he brought a nurse with him. "Sorry to do this without your permission, Mrs. Farrant," he said briskly; "but I am going, for twenty-four hours, to try a treatment that you couldn't possibly give."

She bowed her head. There was nothing else to do. But while Leo slept briefly, with the nurse beside him, she went softly up-stairs to the big attic with the skylight which they had, from pathetic instinct (though Leo Farrant had never seen it) called the "studio." She got out the Tuscan sketches, propped them against the eaves, and stared at them. They weren't things meant to show, to sell. They had been done in happy honeymoon days, when she was

LEDA AND THE SWAN

by his side, to keep his hand in. To see them there called up the dresses she had worn, the rocks on which she had sat, the very taste of the local wine they had drunk together after his morning's work. She knew that never before this had Leo thought of them as marketable: she even, herself, fancied now that they weren't. But they might be, for all she positively knew; and, if so, Mannheimer ought to be sent for. Not Showalter—never. She had hitherto kept Leo's friends from well-meant ministrations, and she would still, to the end. Leo Farrant's name should never figure on the long list of unrewarded talents held up periodically for an admonition to the philistine public. She herself was too much bone of that public's bone, flesh of its flesh, to endure the idea. She wanted, for Leo, peace with honor; though well aware that it does not lie with genius to have both. Oh, she would send for Mannheimer—not for Showalter, kind, gifted, eminent as he was—and she would find the right words to put him off while she welcomed him. She would open no loophole to Mannheimer's keen Semitic eye for tragic fact. Besides, Mannheimer, she was pretty sure, didn't gossip; was capable of

LEDA AND THE SWAN

holding his tongue with a sæcular reticence. And if he liked the things at all, he would make it out to purchasers that his acquisition had been, not charity, but inimitable luck—and *flair*. She knew her Mannheimer as well as Leo.

A little appeased, for the moment—for how could the sketches look so beautiful to her and not be beautiful for others?—she sat down on a trunk, and let her tense, tired limbs relax. Slight as it was, it was the first freedom—with Leo asleep and a nurse beside him—that she had known for months. It had been long indeed since she had consulted her comfort unconsciously, like any other person. She had never wanted to leave her husband; she had kept so close to him that most people probably thought them elsewhere—anywhere except in town still, at Mrs. Bleeker's. Showalter was supposed to know; but he himself was here, there, and everywhere, painting the portraits that it amused him to paint. And Showalter tired Leo: they had, good friends as they were, such different points of view. Showalter was all with the moderns; and Leo all with the far-off, time-tested classics, with luminous Italy and splendid, twilit

LEDA AND THE SWAN

Spain. Their world wasn't his world; though once, before that accursed horse plunged, he had obviously hoped to make theirs his. Now, the tumult and the shouting were all for Showalter. Well, what did they want with the tumult and the shouting? Weren't they "free among the dead"?

Her moment of rest—of liberty rather than of real rest, for the trunk wasn't over-comfortable—spurred afresh the willing courage in her, and drove her to a new adventure. She would, quietly there alone, look once more at the "Leda" for which she had posed to her husband: the picture that he considered his masterpiece. She rose and went to the farther side of the room, the light falling rustily on her golden head through the dirty skylight. There it was, in its wrappings. She unfolded them, unswathed it, and sat down on the rough board floor to look at it.

"Has it been so long since I have seen a picture?" That was what she murmured to herself at last, to explain away her tears. "Was I ever so lovely?" came the whisper. "Oh, no, I never was; it is Leo, Leo. Nothing but his lost hand could ever have made

LEDA AND THE SWAN

me so beautiful. Yet it's I—not the shadow of a hope that it could be taken for any one else." She shook the tears from her eyes and bent nearer the canvas.

She recalled, with a sudden, synthetic mental gesture, all the history of its creation: how strange it had seemed to her, though used from infancy to models as part of the business of life, to pose, herself; how oddly impersonal Leo had been about it, criticising each gesture (she had tried so long before she got that listless droop of the head as she gazed across the green turf at the approaching swan); and yet how sometimes he had broken off to come and kiss her hand most gently, and beg her to rest. He had accused her at first of being Elsa rather than Leda; but even Leo could find nothing Gothic—term of superlative reproach!—in her beauty; and, in the end, with her, not in spite of her, he had worked out his idea. Loveliness caught in a doom of which it is a little careless; passionless acceptance of the passions of the most high gods; passivity that will not compromise itself by any fear, or flight, or lamentation—he had flung the legend to the winds for the sake of his symbol. She remembered it all—all. It

LEDA AND THE SWAN

had never been hung; though in his old studio it had always been at hand, like this, behind its wrappings, enclosed in its sumptuous Venetian frame. No one had ever seen it: there would never be any critic to confirm or confute Leo's judgment of it. It was hers—done for her, with her, by her. Couldn't Leo see what that meant to her? It had nothing to do with his art—save that it insisted, not without malice, on being a masterpiece.

Then she heard herself called by Mrs. Bleeker's voice from below; and closing and locking the door quickly, she ran down-stairs. The nurse awaited her on the threshold—a stiff white creature for whose services she prayed inwardly Mannheimer would presently pay. Farrant had waked; and Miss Dall wanted the doctor sent for. Mrs. Farrant went down-stairs to telephone; but the doctor was not in, and she had to leave a message for him. While Farrant dropped off again later into a troubled sleep, she wrote to Mannheimer; and then, with a docility born of long discipline, ate her luncheon, which tasted like nothing, and which she did not want.

By mid-afternoon the doctor came; and this time

LEDA AND THE SWAN

it seemed to her that his firm tread was more nervous. When he came out of the bedroom and closed the door, after whispering to Miss Dall on the threshold, she faced him squarely.

“Well?”

The physician shrugged his shoulders patiently. “Mrs. Farrant, I don’t see any real hope for him at all. It is kinder to tell you. There is just one chance.” He studied her face. “Windisch—the biggest specialist in the world, you know, for this sort of thing—is still in New York. He came over to operate on James L. Gillenton’s daughter.”

She nodded; she read the paper to Leo every morning while he breakfasted.

“Well; there’s just the hundredth chance that Windisch, if he could see your husband, could do something for him. Of course, Windisch gets a bigger fee than—” He smiled at her kindly and ruefully.

“How much?”

“I don’t know. He might be approached—if there is time before he sails. I could perhaps get at him through Doctor Melcher, who knows him. But even if he made it nominal, it would run into the

LEDA AND THE SWAN

hundreds. And if Windisch thought he could do anything, it would mean an operation and a very long convalescence in a hospital. I couldn't in the least say, Mrs. Farrant."

"Thousands." She murmured it to herself.

"Before you got through with it, yes. And of course, only a chance. I think, all things considered, even Windisch probably wouldn't operate." He seemed to be trying to let her down easily.

Marie Farrant closed her eyes. Fantastic sums in addition seemed to be traced on the inner lids; she could see, with shut eyes, nothing but black figures on a yellowish background. Presently she looked at the doctor again. "If you can possibly get Windisch to come—I think I can manage it. Provided, that is, his fee is what you call nominal. I couldn't pay Gillenton prices—well, no matter what happened."

"Perhaps I can manage it. I'll go and see Melcher myself. And—if you could get a little rest while he sleeps. For he will sleep now—I've seen to that. You're a sensible woman; lie down and relax a little, if you can't do more." He shook hands with her, and went out.

LEDA AND THE SWAN

The rest of the day dragged on as best it could for Mrs. Farrant. She sat with Leo while the nurse rested; she withdrew patiently when the nurse told her to. There were a few practical things that she could do: fetching and carrying, and sterilizing absurd little objects. All inanimate objects seemed absurd to her; though, inasmuch as Leo needed them in mysterious ways, they were sacred. When there were not practical things to do, she lay helplessly on her sofa, shut her eyes, and contemplated the black figures on the yellow background. She would almost have sent for Showalter, if she hadn't seen, in a morning paper, that he had sailed for Europe. Towards evening the doctor came again—another visit to write down on her calendar. He was softly jubilant. He had told Melcher all about the case; Melcher had arranged it for him; Windisch would come in the morning. The fee, he hoped, would be as small as—Farrant not being of the medical profession—could humanly be expected. She could not but see, across her bitter anxiety, that the doctor was elated at the undreamed-of chance of consulting with Windisch. He might have

LEDA AND THE SWAN

waited years for such a coincidence: Windisch's presence, and a case precisely in Windisch's line! To such uses had Leo Farrant come! "He'll sleep now," the doctor had said again, as he left. "The afternoon has worn him out. You must remember, Mrs. Farrant," he went on, "that the pain, though it's bad when it comes, isn't constant. Miss Dall will be there, in any case. So I think I'll prescribe for you, now." He held his hypodermic syringe lightly between his fingers.

"Oh, no!" she protested. "If she wanted me and I shouldn't wake!"

"She'll wake you fast enough if she does want you. Only an eighth of a grain—so that you'll be fresh for Windisch in the morning. He may want to ask you a lot of questions." Then, as she shook her head: "My dear lady, I know what I'm about. I know just the symptoms for which this stuff is good and those for which it isn't. Just at this moment you need it more than you need anything else. You'll be fit as a fiddle to-morrow—and you'll need to be. I know you pretty well, and I know the kind of night you would have if you didn't do this."

LEDA AND THE SWAN

Still she demurred. "What time is Doctor Windisch coming?"

"Eleven sharp."

Mannheimer, if he got her note, would come at ten-thirty. She bared her arm obediently.

Leo Farrant braced himself admirably, the next morning, to meet the great specialist. Miss Dall, accustomed to every manifestation of the impulse to live, took it for hope. Marie Farrant knew better. Leo was merely counting on the luxury of being pulled to pieces by a first-rate intelligence: he was supremely interested. He had not expected anything so exciting to happen to him again—ever. They were very cheerful, the three, together; with that strange spontaneous gayety which often bursts into sudden flower in a sick-room. Waiting for Windisch gave them all respite; until he came there was no need to think. It was hardest, for every reason, on Mrs. Farrant; not least because she had Mannheimer to face at half past ten. She could not tell Leo about the appointment. She was glad that she didn't have to; though it stabbed her to see him so helpless that one could keep things from him. She managed to

LEDA AND THE SWAN

get a word in her sitting-room with Miss Dall when Mannheimer's card came up—enough to make sure that her retreat to the attic with the dealer would be skilfully covered for her. How she loathed these evasions—just as she had loathed, for months, the secret, sordid tragedy of her dwindling bank-account. What was left in life when husband or wife had to conceal from the other the other's own affairs?

She made some explanation to Mannheimer below, then led him up, past Leo's very door, to the "studio." Once there, she made him, in all the nonchalant phrases she had so carefully prepared, the offer of the Tuscan sketches. Her preliminary chatter took longer than she had realized it would; Mannheimer had been late; and he had still not committed himself when she heard unmistakable sounds below. Windisch was there. She turned to the dealer. "The specialist I spoke of has come. I am afraid I must go down for a little. But it's natural that you should want some time to look them over."

"Quite so. I'll wait. I do want to look them over." He pursed his lips judiciously, looked about for a seat, found one, and sat down heavily as she left the room.

LEDA AND THE SWAN

It did not take Windisch long to make his examination. Marie Farrant watched the minute-hand of her clock creep interminably on through the brief period. Miss Dall looked loyally out of the window all the while, save that once or twice she cast a keen, sidelong glance at the woman who sat there, hands folded and eyes fixed on the clock. She thought Mrs. Farrant beautiful, but she suspected that her looks would go suddenly and very soon.

Eventually the great man came out. The doctor beckoned to the nurse, and together they went into Farrant's bedroom. Mrs. Farrant was left face to face with Windisch. She rose. "Well?"

He looked at her kindly. How she feared their kindness! It so infallibly meant that there was some special reason for being kind.

He spoke, in the careful academic English of the educated foreigner. "I think, Mrs. Farrant, that there is very little chance. The only hope for your husband would be a grave operation; and it will be only just to say to you that I should greatly fear the result of that. The operation would—how do you say?—either kill or cure. I do not believe that

LEDA AND THE SWAN

it would cure. But there is a slight possibility that it would—one possibility, I might say, out of one hundred.”

“What do you advise?”

His brilliant blue eyes raked the little sitting-room—as if to diagnose it—before he answered slowly: “I cannot, in such a case, advise. You, madam, must decide for yourself. I tell you the facts as I see them.”

“May I have a few hours to make up my mind? I must see my husband.”

He took out his watch. “At four o’clock you may telephone to Doctor Melcher. I would operate tomorrow. I sail to Europe on Saturday.”

“I will telephone. Thank you.” She shook hands with him, as the doctor came out of Leo’s room.

“Well?” he asked, as he crossed the threshold.

“Doctor Windisch will tell you. May I go in now?”

“Not for ten minutes, please. Miss Dall will call you.”

Windisch bowed, and the two physicians went out. Ten minutes gave her time to return to Mannheimer, and she crept up-stairs.

LEDA AND THE SWAN

The dealer shook his head at her as soon as she entered the store-room. "Did Mr. Farrant tell you I would want these?"

"He thought it very unlikely. But he did say it might be worth your looking at them. He hasn't seen them for years. Of course, they are only sketches."

"Oh, they're clever, but they must have been done very young."

"They were." "As long ago as the Garden of Eden," she might have added, but she did not.

"Frankly, Mrs. Farrant, in spite of the great respect I have personally for everything Mr. Farrant ever touched, I don't believe they're marketable. I'll keep an eye out, and let you know, but— Only a very acute critic would know they were Farrants. And critics aren't so acute as that about living artists. It doesn't pay them to be. No—I don't see my way."

He gave his refusal very lightly, she thought. In an instant, she saw why. Mannheimer waved his hand to the opposite wall, and as she turned she saw the "Leda" stripped of the covering that, the night before, she had hastily flung over it.

"Now, for that, Mrs. Farrant, I'll write you a

LEDA AND THE SWAN

cheque on the spot to any tune you like—within reason. And ‘within reason’ leaves you a big margin, too.” He smiled.

She had a sharp sensation of cold about her heart; as if, just in that spot, the blood had chilled.

“That isn’t for sale.”

He bent forward, palms thrust out. “I’ll give you now, on the spot, as much as you would ever get for it. It pretty nearly knocked me over when I saw it—and I’m fairly used to pictures, too.”

Mrs. Farrant was silent. Already the figures had crowded back into her brain, and if she closed her eyes for the merest flutter, she could see the amount of Windisch’s fee (which Doctor Hynes, by pre-arrangement with her, had murmured in her ear as he went out) subtracted from her bank balance. She could see the sharp line drawn beneath, and the three figures of the remainder.

“I don’t need to tell you,” Mannheimer’s voice went on, “that that picture ought to hang in the finest collection in the country.”

“No, you don’t need to tell me that.”

He drew out his cheque-book. “Say when, Mrs.

LEDA AND THE SWAN

Farrant. Unless you have to consult your husband further about it." Then, as she did not answer: "I hope he is not seriously ill."

"Very seriously, Mr. Mannheimer."

"I am exceedingly sorry. America has no one living who can touch him, in my opinion."

"I must go to him now." She flung the covering back over the picture, then walked to the door and opened it for Mannheimer to pass out. He followed her, and she locked the door behind her.

"You don't trust me?" He laughed.

"I don't trust any one with that. I'll let you know if I think of selling."

He shook his head. "Any price you like, Mrs. Farrant. I shan't haggle with you. It honestly won't pay you anything to wait. I tell you frankly, Gillenton would take it to-morrow—at *my* price."

She parted from him on the threshold of her sitting-room. "I'll write, if I decide."

Mannheimer paused an instant, leaning on the stair-rail. Then he looked up at her and whispered hoarsely: "I'll take the sketches, if you'll let me have the big one now."

LEDA AND THE SWAN

Mrs. Farrant nodded. "I'll let you know," she repeated. Then she went into the room and closed the door.

"Well, dear?" Leo Farrant greeted her with a smile. Miss Dall went out, and Marie Farrant bent to kiss her husband.

"Well, dear."

"He told you I was no good, didn't he?"

"Are you sure you ought to talk?"

"Oh, yes, they've done with me for a time. The pain isn't bad now. Good heavens, I must talk while I can!"

"He said there was, with an operation, one chance in a hundred."

"What idiots they are!" he murmured softly.

"Why?"

"To think one will take their hundredth chance. The ninety-nine chances are that I should die of it, aren't they?"

She nodded.

"A pox upon them!" as one would have said in a sturdier day. And how much did he stick you for saying that?"

LEDA AND THE SWAN

She told him.

"Good Lord, my dear, we can't afford it!"

"Oh, yes, we can!"

"Has some one left you money?"

"No; but we can afford anything that's necessary."

"Did you send for Mannheimer?"

"Yes. He came running." She patted his pillow.

"And did he want the stuff?"

Mrs. Farrant rose and pulled down the window-shade a few inches. "He's to send me a cheque to-night."

"How much?"

She pushed the shade up again, but Leo did not notice her gesture.

"The cheque hasn't come. But, according to what he said, I may trust him to do very well by us. So you see we can afford anything that is likely to do us any good."

"I'm very glad." He smiled at her, as she sat down again beside him. "I haven't seen them since the beginning of time, but honestly I didn't think there was much hope. They weren't much, as I remember the lot. You kept getting in the way, you

LEDA AND THE SWAN

know." His hand covered hers. "And besides, I hardly knew anything then."

She frowned slightly. "That's Mannheimer's affair, I think. So you will try the operation?"

He laughed weakly. Sensations that were the precursors of pain were coming upon him. "I should think not! I've never wanted to go out under ether. And that is what it would really amount to. Their talk of my 'chance'! No, indeed. If there had been a real chance, he'd have carried me off bodily—he wouldn't have hemmed and hawed to you."

"How do you know what he did?"

"I know every line of your face, my dear."

"But, Leo darling——"

"It's all right. I've always been ready to get out when my time came. If there were one chance in a million to give me back my arm—well, that would be a sporting proposition. We'd see."

"You don't care just to be well—with me? Remember there's all the Mannheimer money coming in."

"No, thanks. Remember he couldn't be enthusiastic, even for the sake of doing a little sleight of

LEDA AND THE SWAN

hand among my vital organs. And they love doing it, you know, just as I loved to paint. No, I'm content as I am. I should feel a fool—a fool." His voice died away in a murmur, and he closed his eyes. "I'm just glad," he whispered, "that you'll have something to go on with. Awfully glad of that, Marie. I always liked Mannheimer, you know—not like most of them." The pain had come, and she summoned the nurse.

Doctor Hynes could not say, when he returned that afternoon, that he considered Farrant's decision unwise. "I won't force him to the operating-table against his will," she explained, "unless you or Windisch can give me more hope than he gave me this morning. I should feel that I had killed him, when he didn't want to be killed."

"Oh, I don't think Windisch really wants to operate, you know." The doctor, fingering a tiny square of brocade, did not look at her. "But he wouldn't have considered it honest to say that there was no hope—if you measure hope as they do radium. It lies with you entirely. Of course, it would be a very great expense."

LEDA AND THE SWAN

"There is plenty of money," she broke in. "We can perfectly afford the operation *if* that hope is worth looking at."

He was silent. "I see you don't think it is," she said. "Then how can I violate my husband's will in the matter? For he would only consent, for my sake, because he couldn't refuse me if I seriously asked it."

Doctor Hynes still fingered the brocade.

"You've told me, yourself, everything I want to know," said Mrs. Farrant.

Then he turned. "No, indeed, I haven't. I've only said—as Windisch himself did—that I couldn't advise."

"In another case, you'd advise quickly enough." She smiled. "I don't ask you for another word. I don't hold you responsible in any sense. And now—you said you would be good enough to see that Doctor Windisch's cheque reached him." She went to her desk, wrote the cheque firmly, and handed it to him. "Thank you. One thing I should like to know. How long is he going to live, on this basis?"

He looked at her gravely, kindly, as so often he

LEDA AND THE SWAN

had done. "Not more than a month or two, Mrs. Farrant—with the turn things have taken in forty-eight hours. And the nursing is going to be hard. You had better keep Miss Dall."

"Is there going to be anything to do for him that I can't do? Anything technical, I mean?"

"Nothing that you couldn't learn to do—except perhaps occasionally. But it would be the height of unwisdom for you to do it. It would mean—and I can speak quite positively about that—a complete breakdown for you: years in a sanatorium, perhaps. You are pretty well worn out already."

"I'll chance the sanatorium. It won't in the least matter—afterwards. The only thing I care about is being with my husband every minute now until the end. I should be jealous, you see"—she expounded carefully—"of any one else who did things for him."

"I see how you feel, Mrs. Farrant. But I'm not asking you to leave him. I'm only asking you to take enough care of yourself so that, while he does live, you can be a constant comfort to him—so that you'll be at your best for him, all the time. And I should be sorry to have you let Miss Dall go, and later have

LEDA AND THE SWAN

to fall back on some one else, for she's an exceptionally nice woman. Most nurses would be much more in your way."

"You think I can't put it through?"

"Not to the end."

"Ah, but I can! You don't know the whole of it, Doctor Hynes."

He looked at her keenly. "Since it isn't a question of expense——"

"It's a question of something very different from mere expense. I'm afraid I shall have to have my own way about this."

He stepped into the hall, then turned, with his hand on the door-knob. "I shall have my way in the end, Mrs. Farrant."

"Oh, *in the end*"—she emphasized the words slightly—"you may do anything you like with me."

She paused a moment in the hall, while the doctor went down-stairs; then softly, furtively, climbed the steps to the "studio." Once inside, she turned the key, and sat down where Mannheimer had seated himself in the morning. She was very, very tired; but her nerves had lifted her to the complicated

LEDA AND THE SWAN

strain of the day, and she must take advantage of whatever strength she had, before she was let heavily, helplessly down to the lower levels of power. She did not dare close her eyes; for, if she did, that relentless arithmetical vision would swim beneath her eyelids and confront her. Only three figures: and the doctor, and Miss Dall, and two more months of life, perhaps, for Leo. If she could have been sure of herself, to the end, she would not have lifted her hand. She could trust herself now; but there was no telling what she might do later, with her heavy task upon her, half-crazed with weariness and strain. Mannheimer, waving a beneficent cheque, might, then, induce her to anything. She must do it now, while she could—before Mannheimer, returning and returning to the charge, should wear her out and drag consent from her.

She looked about the store-room for something to achieve her purpose with. She didn't want to ask Mrs. Bleeker for anything. In a dusty corner she found a screw-driver, and she seized it with a little gasp of relief. That would do. Lifting the covering from the picture, she gazed at it a moment. Her

LEDA AND THE SWAN

tears blinded her; presently, she knew, she would feel like some nameless vandal. Grasping the screw-driver, she drew her hand back, and pierced the canvas with one straight stroke. Then she closed her eyes—as if she expected to be sickened with the sight of blood. The black figures on the yellowish ground were no longer there; instead, she saw Mannheimer's smile. Then, blindly, she dragged the implanted screw-driver down, in a firm diagonal. When she looked again, her work was done: a jagged rent passed through the wondrous white body of Leda, across the canvas, to the smooth plumage of the swan. "It isn't worth a penny now," she murmured. Then she flung the tool away from her, loathing it as if it had killed. She covered the picture, wedging the cloth tightly round the frame, and left the attic, locking the door carefully behind her.

As she entered her husband's room, he smiled at her. The pain had left him for another interval. The old phrase came. "Well, dear?" He held out his hand.

She took it. "Well?" And, smiling, she kissed him.

THE WEAKER VESSEL

THE WEAKER VESSEL

SLOWLY, very slowly, he laid down the photograph, but not to get rid of it. His eyes still rested on it where it lay.

“It stands to reason—it must be there, or they couldn’t have photographed it. Nothing but a photograph would prove it.” The words broke suddenly from his lips while his eyes pursued their contemplation.

“I saw a picture once—a faint speck of a lamasery perched on the very top of a Himalayan spur. That gave me a little the same feeling. But that was only an illustration for a story in a magazine; it was stunning, but wholly imagined. There was an eagle, out of all proportion, in the middle distance. This—oh, this is the real thing! I’d give my last drop of blood, I’d traffic with Mephistophilis, to see this at sunset, or once, just once, for one little half-hour, under the full moon. I would; I swear I would!”

THE WEAKER VESSEL

Targett clenched his fist and was silent. He had not taken his eyes from the photograph. He reached mechanically for his pipe, touched it, then relinquished it, prolonging his stare.

The lamplight fell on the ruined city and its peak—a peak as incredible as Teneriffe. It fell on sheer precipices and audacious ridges; on terraces that skirted cunningly escarpments where there could never have been more than foothold above the abyss; on insolent rocks crowned with machicolations as old as time; on distant mountains carelessly shouldering their way twenty thousand feet into the inane. It reiterated, with each spot it touched, the mystery: a monolithic city on an impregnable peak, girdled by a natural moat a mile deep; temples, fountains, stairways, dwellings, signal-towers, and gardens—all the paraphernalia of life elaborated just beneath the clouds.

“Not a scrap of writing; petroglyphs of the rudest; only that magnificent masonry left to hint the tale.” There was something mournful in Targett’s voice.

Targett had the habit of talking aloud to himself in

THE WEAKER VESSEL

his own rooms. In the first place, there were seldom, in his wing, any servants about to overhear him; in the second, his own voice, addressing no one, was as nearly mitigating a sound as he heard in the course of the often immitigable day. He was at heart a companionable creature; he liked vocal agreement with his mood, even if it had to come from his own lips. Agreement with his mood seldom came from Evelyn. He fancied she thought him a poor stick. From her point of view, a poor stick he was almost bound to be. Therefore, he had always given in to Evelyn. Her contempt had been made manifest on the honeymoon itself, and in the years that followed he had gone on renouncing. The house, the guests, the budget, the *régime* had all been Evelyn's. Wives were often dominant in happy marriages—he understood that—and the ease with which he had put his own head under the yoke proved that he had no theoretical objection to being ruled. But Evelyn's despotism had shown itself less and less benevolent, and in the end he had begun to plan shyly a campaign of his own. The worm had turned in secrecy and silence, feigning all the while the most disarming humility.

THE WEAKER VESSEL

After the death of their elder child, the boy, Targett had become a subtle schemer for freedom. His campaign was feminine in its aspect, if masculine in patient endurance. While he plotted, his attitude of bored pliancy took on a perfection of finish that sometimes almost deceived himself. No wonder that Evelyn in her more affectionate moods called him "Barkis."

"Basil is deep, you know, very deep," Evelyn used to say, with a laugh that made his alleged profundity entirely a matter of her own cleverness. And the people who continued to like, or had begun to adore, her shimmering smartness, her intelligence, which was lavished wholly on details, roared over her old wines and modern *entrées* with a private conviction that there *was* a woman! If Basil was deep, it must be with a blank, fathomless depth inimical to life, a cold, calcareous ooze where even starfish could not thrive. Very few of their acquaintance chose Basil. Warner Levison chose him—had chosen him for all time, before Evelyn swung into their common knowledge—but Warner hardly counted in the set Evelyn drew about her. Warner Levison had

THE WEAKER VESSEL

never commented on Evelyn since her marriage to Basil. Before the engagement he had once said:

“I don’t care how ripping her ancestry is; she’s not a lady.”

“No, but she is a gentleman,” Basil had answered.

“I don’t think so. She’s only a good sport.”

“That’s something, when you consider the feminine creatures we have to choose among.” Basil had been bland; Evelyn Myres amused him immensely.

Basil had remembered the conversation every day for many years—remembered it while he schemed for freedom in his lonely, lamplit hours. He did not know now whether Evelyn was a good sport or not; he knew only that, if she was, a good sport was the last type on earth to make him happy, the last type to which he himself could ever afford satisfaction. Probably she *was* a good sport: she used the term constantly as a form of praise; she had even once or twice used it about the bishop. (Evelyn was “High,” and clattered to confession monthly.) Perhaps the truest way to express their common attitude is to say that each considered the other a completely futile creature, and, in nervous moments, loathed the spec-

THE WEAKER VESSEL

tacle of that alien futility. Evelyn still amused Basil, but he cared less and less about being amused. On the other hand, Evelyn trusted Basil, but she more and more realized that the days when it is supremely important to trust some one are very few. For daily use and wont, she would have preferred a nice taste in cocktails.

To-night, he had thought himself at last free. Yet interruptions were not over, even now. A step in the corridor set his lulled nerves to vibrating in the old way. No servant would have been permitted to walk with that resolute staccato click which was the very symbol of Evelyn Targett's impressive frivolity. Her little French heels had often seemed to beat out the very rhythm to which his life was forced tempestuously to waste itself. At first he was annoyed. He had not intended to tell her for a day or two yet; but it would be impossible to have an intimate talk with her and not make the great disclosure. Could he put it off, savor a little longer the perfection of his plot, the secret prospect of his freedom? Even as he heard the approaching footsteps, he began to debate, to vacillate. And then she was in the

THE WEAKER VESSEL

room, and all other problems were set aside, as always, by the problem of facing her immediate presence without diminished vitality.

"What's up, Evelyn?" There had to be some sort of beginning, and there was no point in pretending that her appearance in his study at that hour was normal.

Evelyn Targett fidgetted about the table, procuring herself a cigarette and lighting it. She rejected three different boxes before she chose one; but Basil did not suspect her of nervousness. Evelyn always dramatized the little gestures of life. Choosing a cigarette was the kind of thing she put her mind on.

"Nothing much."

She leaned back against the table, the fingers of her left hand drumming lightly on the surface. Then she turned for another match, and caught sight of the mounted photograph.

"What's this? You never showed it to me. Oh, pretty stunning, isn't it?" She held it at arm's length.

"Yes. Would you care for it?" He took some private comfort from the ironic question.

THE WEAKER VESSEL

"No, thanks. My room is pretty well cluttered now with those objects Pierrot Pratt fetched home from Japan. I'm thinking of doing it over with grass-cloth and a carved table six inches high for the tea ceremony. It would be so good for all our manners. And I could have Shinuchi down to give me lessons in doing the flowers. I shall have to have something for Lent, you know, and the Japanese thing is rather ascetic in its own way."

"Isn't the Japanese thing rather played out?"

"Oh, cheap Japanese, yes; but those ivories of Pierrot's are extremely good, and if I made the thing absolutely complete, it would be *chic* enough. Anything's *chic*, if you only go the whole hog." Her animation died down, and she puffed her cigarette silently. He wondered why her animation should go.

"Is this what's up?"

She turned and looked at him for a moment before she spoke. The spectacle of Evelyn's beauty, if beauty that various and nondescript quality could properly be called, was not new to Basil Targett; but occasionally he still marvelled at it—marvelled,

THE WEAKER VESSEL

at least, that a face and form he so admired, which in themselves had scarcely altered since the days when they touched him to passion, should have learned to leave him so cold. Her smooth chestnut hair, with its absurd widow's peak; her complexion, which neither maternity nor cocktails could impair; her slim body, with its odd and taking combination of boyish slimness and feminine fulness; her habitual exquisiteness in every detail of the toilet—a "good sport" all frills and fragrance: they were all there, as always, with their multitudinous appeal, which he of all men had learned most completely the secret of withstanding. His nerves and his soul, in odd alliance, continued to reject her. Against them, what could the lust of the eye do? Yet his glance played approvingly over the tiger-lily hues of her satin negligée, the great necklace of topazes around her throat, the burnished reflections in her vivid hair. Emancipated himself, he could none the less foresee a dim, ineluctable procession of male creatures to her net. And for that he cared so little! He had now the dear-bought indifference of safety.

"No, that's not what's up," she said at last. "By

THE WEAKER VESSEL

the way, your fire's smoking." She bustled about the business of mending it. Basil did not attempt to help: Evelyn always liked managing other people's interiors. Her exceeding bodily vitality took most kindly to concrete things.

"What *is* up?" he asked when the clatter of the fire-irons was stilled.

"Well," —she took another cigarette, and flung herself into an armchair—"this is up: I want before long to pull out for a time."

Targett stared at her. Almost anything else would have surprised him less. Her restlessness spent itself always in a narrow orbit: she hated to move except in short, violent dashes; she hated to travel; in a queer way, she liked her home better than anything. Within her home, to be sure, she had no desire for privacy: she ran it on the lines of a country club. Still, she clung to her own vine and fig-tree, and ate their fruit with relish.

"Why do you want to pull out? And where to?" It seemed extraordinary that their two desires, reaching the surface at last, should show faces so like.

"Anywhere; Europe, I suppose." He had not

THE WEAKER VESSEL

been able to get her to Europe since their honeymoon.

“But why?”

She inhaled a few whiffs without replying. Then she clicked her white teeth together meditatively a few times.

“Well, it’s like this: I want to get off, out of it all; I’m in rather a bad way.”

“Health?” He would be, he realized, the last person to know, if she had an ailment.

“No; my health’s perfectly good. Nerves—with a very special cause.”

He stared. When Evelyn was nervous, nerves were the last thing she would own up to.

“Have you seen a specialist?”

“No.”

“What’s the cause?”

“Barkis, old boy, I want to get away from you.” Evelyn had never learned the psychologist’s decorum.

“That’s easy.” He smiled. “Something’s up here, too. But I thought I had been less objectionable the last year or so.”

THE WEAKER VESSEL

"You've been rather uncommonly nice. But it isn't just you. I shall put it rather badly, I expect, but I'll get it out as best I can. The fact is, there's no use pretending there's any 'sacred terror' for you and me. We've a nice solid basis of a sort, but we don't take each other's fancy. I don't know whether any one else takes yours, but a man has turned up who takes mine. It's straight common sense for me to nip it in the bud; so I think I'll cut and run."

"Alone?"

"Lord, no! I shall probably take Madeline Frew along. Otherwise, who would ever tell me if the dressmaker had got a proper fit? But he won't come; he can't."

"Who's the man? Pratt?"

"Good shot, Basil! I didn't think you had it in you."

"Oh, that's easy. He's even more different from me than the rest of the crowd."

"Yes, he is," she answered simply. His irony she chose to let pass unnoticed.

"Naturally, he doesn't know," she went on. "I wouldn't have him guess for the world."

THE WEAKER VESSEL

"But what is your ultimate solution if he never guesses?"

She shot a surprised look at him. It was one thing not to cut up rough, but, really, old Basil was cynical coolness itself.

"I prefer never to have anything to regret—anything silly and missish, I mean. Of course, there's no danger of anything serious."

"Are you sure?" He wondered just how sure she was.

"I don't know whether I could suffer if I tried, but I certainly don't intend to risk it. I'm not the sort of woman that lets her emotions run away with her. That's all beastly rot, you know. But I'm getting to the point where it is absolutely necessary to my comfort to see a certain amount of Pierrot. I mean to go away until he has ceased to be necessary to me in any degree."

He wondered if the decent thing were not to let her have it straight how very little he cared.

"You are quite at liberty to arrange your life without reference to me, you know. I don't mean that I want a scandal, naturally; but you can count

THE WEAKER VESSEL

on me to put no obstacles in your way. These things can be managed perfectly without scandal nowadays, if people have a little patience."

She stared at him.

"I knew you had sense, Basil, and I knew you weren't in love with me any longer; but this is really too much. What has got into you? Besides, don't I tell you I'm not the victim of a passion? I simply don't choose to be made absurd; I don't choose to want anything I haven't got; I don't choose to be inconvenienced. Therefore, I'm going to go away for a time and let myself be amused by something besides Pierrot Pratt. You needn't assume that I want to have an affair with him. Personally, I don't believe that any man is worth getting into a mess for. My instincts don't lie that way, in any case. I repeat, I don't choose to be inconvenienced."

He smiled at the portrait she presented of herself. It was quite true: Evelyn was hard as nails and cool as porcelain. It was the law of her life to be radiant, to be kind, to be a "good sport"; but it was supremely the law of her life not to be inconvenienced. He wondered just how much he was going to inconvenience her.

THE WEAKER VESSEL

“So,” she pursued, intent on her own predicament, “I am going to pull out, and I wanted to consult you a little about it. Madeline Frew will have to know, if I am to get her to go with me. I suppose it’s all right, isn’t it? It needn’t affect any plans of yours. You can go up to the Inlet as usual with Jessica. I shall probably be back by autumn; I couldn’t stand travelling for longer than that.” She faced him, not troubled now, but aglow with practicality; already—so like her!—taking comfort from the business of detail to be considered.

“It doesn’t affect me at all”—Basil saw her radiance shine a little mistily as he looked towards her—“because, you see, I’m going to pull out, too.”

She twisted about in her chair with a quick movement of her whole body.

“Going to pull out? What do you mean?” She spoke as sharply as though she had been an injured wife.

Basil Targett smiled.

“Probably about the same thing that you do, except that there’s no other lady who amuses me one tenth so much as you.”

“Do you mean that you’re really in love?”

THE WEAKER VESSEL

"I have never been in love with any one but you, Evelyn." A little frown contracted her brows; he proceeded to dispel it. "And you have stated the case perfectly in regard to us, I think. There's nothing in it any more for either of us." Her forehead grew smooth, as if for a moment she had really been afraid of a sentimental appeal.

"You mean you're just bored and need a change? Well"—she spoke grudgingly—"I suppose you could meet us somewhere, and we could hang about together for a month. You and Johnny Frew might come over and bring us home. But"—her tone was hurt—"you know we don't like the same things, and there would be no sense in repeating that dreadful wedding-journey."

He winced a little, could still wince, at the manner of her reference.

"My good Evelyn, I don't want to travel with you any more than you want to travel with me. Don't worry about that. Besides, I'm not doing anything you could do." No: he had been very careful to set his heart on an adventure that she couldn't share.

THE WEAKER VESSEL

"Well, what *is* your idea?" Her unmodulated voice was harsh with excitement.

"I won't waste words, Evelyn. I'll simply say that I have been planning this for a very long time. Every conceivable detail is attended to; I've provided for every reasonable contingency. I am going out there"—he pointed at the photograph of the ruined city—"in Warbeck's expedition. We start in June. I shall be in the interior at least three years. My word is definitely given; my passage is taken; my arrangement is complete. After this work, there will be more. I join forces with Warbeck finally. I've found my *métier*; and, barring accidents, I shall stick to it. You simply won't be troubled with me any further. Jessica, of course, stays with you. I'm sorry to lose sight of her; but she's too young to care. It's part of the price I pay for saving my life. I've arranged money matters so that you can't possibly suffer. I've held on until I could see to that. Jessica's money is already in trust for her; I've made you and Warner Levison trustees."

She was perfectly silent. Looking at her again, he could almost focus her stillness. Usually she dazzled

THE WEAKER VESSEL

him; he was visually aware of the vibration of her mind. Even when he was not with her, he could feel her stirring like a wind through the house. But now she was as still, as integral, as anybody.

“Of course, my going is a perfectly good pretext for the world. I can’t do this particular work at home, and you couldn’t—not if you were ten Griseldas rolled into one—accompany me. People will get used to it. It holds water, I think, in any position. It’s perfectly reasonable. It’s like being a naval officer or a discoverer of the Pole. It’s a classified position; *c’est connu*.”

“Except that every one knows it isn’t your profession. Any one could see it was just a laughable makeshift. It’s not as if you had a reputation.” She offered her objection coldly, still without stirring, without upsetting anything.

“Well, my dear, that isn’t absolutely true. I have a reputation of a sort; very quietly and privately acquired, to be sure—it’s natural you shouldn’t know about it. I’ve been working to this end for some years. Now and then I’ve done an article for one of the learned periodicals. It wouldn’t have interested you;

THE WEAKER VESSEL

it couldn't have. But you must have known that I was spending my time on something. And if you're inclined to doubt my word, I might say that Warbeck wouldn't have wanted me if he hadn't thought I could be useful. I'm not financing Warbeck: that wouldn't be fair to you. I'm paying only my own expenses. But really, Evelyn," he finished, "did you never wonder what I was putting my mind on for ten hours a day?"

"I thought you were just mooning about. And I certainly thought you were spending more time on business." The aggressive note sounded faintly again in her voice.

"Ah, well, I've had to spend more time on it than I cared to. I should have been off long since if there hadn't been you and Jessica to think of. But the result is that we're both well enough off to do what we like."

"And you propose to leave me here like that, and never come back? I tell you now, once for all, quite definitely, that I consent to no such arrangement."

The whole thing might as well be said now, he thought. He spoke very quietly.

THE WEAKER VESSEL

"Your natural course, I dare say, will be to divorce me after an interval. I don't care a damn if you do. I'd rather you would, if you find any man you can be happier with. So why run away from Pierrot Pratt? You'll have money enough for both. I've held on until I could see to that."

Evelyn rose. She shook out her skirts, folded her arms, and faced him; but her termagant pose could not rob her of grace.

"Basil Targett, have you never realized that I have a church and a creed?"

He had been wondering what point she would select for her attack, but he had not expected this. He had really thought that, once reassured about money, she would be relieved. However, he must meet her.

"I realized that you had a church—you fast so riotously in Lent, for example—but I didn't suppose you had any more of a creed than the rest of us. There's so much icing at St. Jude's that you never get to the cake."

He tried to speak, though lightly, without irreverence. He wasn't there to-night to discuss religion.

THE WEAKER VESSEL

"Of course, I know you're a dissenter, if not worse," she went on; "but I am a churchwoman, and divorce doesn't exist for me."

"My dear girl, I didn't mean to insult you. You needn't divorce if you don't want to. I certainly shan't. But that doesn't affect the arrangement, does it?"

"You forget another thing—that marriage is a sacrament."

The statement fell and echoed in the midnight stillness of the house like a great brazen globe bounding and rebounding. Targett turned away and bit his lip. To him it seemed that marriage declared a sacrament in that tone of voice proclaimed itself no sacrament at all.

"I don't believe that, you know," he said finally. "I've experienced it, and I know that it isn't. If the rest of your sacraments are no better than our marriage has been, then they are not the agents of salvation."

"Blaspheme if you must, Basil, but there we are."

Did she really believe it, or was it only part of her

THE WEAKER VESSEL

generalship? Her tone did not divulge. He grew irritated.

"As a woman of the world, Evelyn, I ask you if any single thing in our relation during the last two years has seemed to you sacred in any sense?" She did not answer, and he went on: "Besides, even the church allows separation."

"Do you think you have any legitimate excuse for separating yourself from me? I don't make any complaint. Can you make any that would hold even in the sight of the civil law?"

He turned away.

"No." He was silent for a moment, then added: "You'll notice that I'm not making any, if it comes to that; but before the tribunal of the human heart a good many things might be said. Before that tribunal, I think I should make as good a showing as you. The fact remains that we bring out the worst things in each other. If you have a soul, I must starve it as you starve mine."

"My soul is my own affair, I think." She spoke shortly.

"I think it is. By the same token, my soul is *my*

THE WEAKER VESSEL

affair. And I intend to save it." He glanced instinctively at the photograph of the ruined city on its peak.

"I am very willing for you to save your soul, but I don't believe for a moment that you can do it by breaking with every law of religion and society. It is preposterous."

Targett sighed. Evelyn was the last person in the world with whom he would dream of discussing laws, either social or religious. Did the fact that she was his wife give her the right to insist, at a crucial moment, on having out with him, by his fire, all the questions that humanity has been vexing itself with through the ages? If it did, they would still be sitting there when death came, two palsied old people who disagreed. He stirred impatiently.

"I am not going into that with you. You and I mean very different things by religion and society. We should never get anywhere. I only ask you, as a woman of the world—the world in which we both move—if you consider ours a happy marriage."

To his surprise, she took some time to answer him, and stood quite still while she reflected. She

THE WEAKER VESSEL

had not moved when at last she opened her lips to speak.

"I have no illusions about marriage. I daresay we are as happy as any one else. I am not complaining."

He struck his fist on the table, suddenly nervous, suddenly angry.

"But I am ! The only thing that has made life tolerable for me, these last years, has been the prospect of getting out." He mastered himself then, and spoke more quietly: "You see, Evelyn, you are the only creature on earth that can make me hysterical. You madden every nerve in me." He smiled at her.

Evelyn Targett did not smile. She folded her arms on the back of the chair from which she had risen.

"I dare say that is true. It's the only way I can account for your preposterous manners. I'll even go so far as to say that I am sorry. There are people whose every nerve I don't madden, but probably there are a good many others like you. All the same, I can't see that it alters our fundamental situation. You aren't the most congenial person in the world to me, but I don't any the less regard you as my

THE WEAKER VESSEL

husband. And I certainly do not consent to any absurd separation of the sort you suggest."

"I really don't think you can help yourself. But, in Heaven's name, Evelyn, why doesn't it suit you? Out with it! Don't hide behind the church. Tell me the truth, and let's see if we can't get at something."

"Tell you the truth? Man, I *have* told you the truth. It isn't decent, what you're proposing. There would be an endless scandal, as you perfectly know. I don't choose to be deserted when I haven't done any of the things that justify desertion. Have I refused to be your wife or to bear you children?" He flushed, but did not speak, and she went on: "Have I been unfaithful to you? Have I squandered your substance and got you into debt? Have I slandered you to any human being? Have I left your house, or refused my responsibilities as mistress of it? I might be accused of any or all of those things if you chucked me as you propose. Other people don't take marriage so lightly as you. You often talk as if I offended your archaic tastes, but I assure you that yours are the morals of the day after to-morrow. They aren't the morals of *my* world."

THE WEAKER VESSEL

He laughed bitterly. The city on the peak seemed very far away, as if by sheer excess of vital force she had shoved it to another planet.

"The morals of your world, Evelyn? I think I'd drop that pose, if I were you. I know you are conventional in your own absurd way, but you needn't pretend that even divorce shocks you as much as all that. Besides, you know, you may say anything you like about me, once I'm clear of it all."

"I never have been a liar, and I don't intend, at my age, to change my type."

He reflected curiously, at that instant, that something honest had always looked at him out of her eyes.

"No, you're not a liar. You're merely illogical. You won't go to the bottom of things—even of your religion. You don't dare plunge into the well. You know, and I know, that while we've been technically irreproachable in our relations with each other, we've been grotesquely ill-mated. If it were worth your while, you'd admit it. What I want to get at is the reason why you find it more convenient not to."

Her answer struck him as irrelevant.

THE WEAKER VESSEL

"Haven't you any pity?" she asked.

"Pity for you, Evelyn? You taught me long ago that you would see us all damned before you would take pity from any one—above all, from me." Pity! He could not keep irony out of his tone. Evelyn Targett asking for quarter!

"I tell you that I'm in a hole, and you shrug your shoulders over it; you take yourself off at the mere mention of it."

"I virtually took myself off before you mentioned it. My arrangements, as I think I said, have been made for a long time."

But she went on accusingly:

"I do the sporting thing: I tell you frankly that I like another man."

Targett smiled.

"And I do the sporting thing: I tell you frankly that I don't care a hang, and that you're welcome to him."

"I don't want him," she said with cold brevity. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Whatever you want, I give you your freedom, and I take mine."

THE WEAKER VESSEL

"Ah, but my freedom isn't worth the name, as you very well know."

That was always the way: she depreciated whatever she took from him, though she always took it. He was irritated.

"I give you your chance. If you choose to mess it, it isn't my fault."

"What you suggest isn't a chance. The only chance you ever gave me was the chance of being your wife, for whatever it might be worth. I took it. Now you propose to take it away from me, to violate your contract."

"What did I give you in marrying you that I don't leave you now? I leave you as much money as you would ever have had. I leave you Jessica, in whom I have a half-right, at least. I deprive you only of my uncongenial society and my despised, though intermittent, attentions. In exchange for what you are so well rid of, I offer you Pratt, or any other man you may prefer to me. And if you don't choose to take on any one else—well, you are cold as the arctic drift, after all, and you will doubtless find your account in *that*. What on earth do you

THE WEAKER VESSEL

mean by the chance I am taking away from you?"

She had flung herself again into an armchair, and sat there, brooding, in a gorgeous disorder. "The chance you are taking away?" she said at last. "Why, the chance of our normal life together. The chance of keeping up an unbroken contract to the end, of living in a morally and legally recognized condition, of having a decent world on our side. I've never pretended I should have been better off if I hadn't married you. I may have had my private disillusionments, as you say you have, but I haven't gone back on my bargain. I've played the game. And you've got to play it, too. You undertook to do certain things when you married me. You go back on all of them if you chuck me now when I particularly need you, when I'm on the edge of temptation. I've never pretended that it wasn't a big thing to have my husband between me and the world."

"Are you asking me to protect you? And from what, since you say you don't want the man?" He had lighted a cigarette, and stood before her, looking down at her.

THE WEAKER VESSEL

"From the exceeding inconvenience of having to fight everything through alone. From the wagging of people's tongues. From ideas' getting into Pierrot's own head. From everything that your mere presence in the flesh, in your own household, would prevent the very possibility of."

"Can't you take care of yourself?"

She brought her little clenched fist down on the arm of the chair.

"Of course I can; but I don't propose to be put to hard labor to do it when your merely keeping your sacred word would do it for me."

"I don't think you're a very good sport, Evelyn." He said it with a musing finality, as though it were a verdict in a case that had been pending for years. So, to him privately, it was; but Evelyn took it as only one more incidental reproach.

"A good sport! Marriage isn't a sporting proposition, my dear. It's a contract, binding before God and Christian men. I dare you to say I've broken it. I dare you to say you aren't breaking it if you go out and mess with that idiotic pile of stones, instead of staying with your wife and child."

THE WEAKER VESSEL

"I should not be breaking what I consider the essentials of the marriage contract—equal generousities and equal liberty."

"There you go with your revolutionary nonsense, your weak individualism! You can't buck the centuries, Basil. There *isn't* any liberty in marriage."

"Haven't you always taken such liberties as you wanted?"

"Ah, but I haven't happened to want the forbidden ones."

There it was in a nutshell. As though both of them felt that the crucial word had been said, silence fell—a comparative silence, marred by the clattering business of Evelyn's taking another cigarette. It was the first she had smoked since their conversation had become serious—clear proof that she now rested her case.

"And you feel justified in making my life hell for the sake of escaping, yourself, a few days of purgatory?" he asked at last.

"Aren't the conditions I offer you the same that I myself have to put up with?"

THE WEAKER VESSEL

"Weren't the conditions that I offered you, in my proposal, the same I myself was getting?"

Even Evelyn Targett seemed struck with the situation thus phrased.

"Yes." She flung one arm above her head, and stared into the bright little fire. "But my conditions are sanctioned, and yours aren't. It just happens that way, I suppose. You seem to be the person to go under. It might quite as well have been I. Suppose I weren't arctic drift; suppose I were latitude nothing, longitude anything: then all the hell would have been for me."

"And you think you would have put up with that?"

She smiled.

"Ah, well, of course I can't tell what it's like when you're latitude nothing."

"You don't even pretend to be honest!" he cried. "You stand on a technicality that happens to be in your favor. Other things being equal, as they are, the greater desire should be satisfied. You never in all your life wanted anything so much as I want to go with Warbeck. The least little instinct for generosity would make you give way to that."

THE WEAKER VESSEL

"You can't expect me to give way to something I can't understand. If it had been another woman, now, Barkis, old boy, I'd try to see it your way. I don't say I could, but I'd honestly try to. At least, one has heard of that sort of thing before; one has something to go on. But you're as arctic as I am; you can do without a wife as well as I can do without a husband. I can't treat this moonshine idea of yours as I would treat an honest, healthy passion of any kind, can I, now?" She smiled patronizingly at him.

It struck Basil Targett, then and there, that an egotist intrenched in a sacred right is the one antagonist you cannot afford to meet. He doubted entirely that she would have shouted with the majority if it had not suited her to do so, but he could not prove it; and there she was, facing him with unchallengeable millions, dead and alive, at her back. The safety of Evelyn had always been, he reflected, that her odiousness was sanctioned. She had never so much as stretched her hand across the forbidden line. She had made him very wretched, but only in permitted ways. He began to suspect that he could never call her bluff, and he knew the authentic flavor of

THE WEAKER VESSEL

despair. With that taste in his mouth, he tried once more.

"I still can't believe you'll cling to me against my clearly expressed desire to leave you, Evelyn. Can't you take my word for my own passion?"

He took up the photograph, but it gave him no assurance, no helpful eloquence; his fundamental shyness held him. He could not be articulate for her, strut out his emotion before the uncomprehending eyes of a painted block. It would be perilously like pleading, to his sumptuous wife, the charms of an obscure and unhandsome mistress. What, if he told Evelyn, could she afford him but pity—pity as for light loves of the meanest? He *was* a poor stick, even, at last, from his own point of view. He ought to have been able to shake her off; but his muscles were apparently developed only for passive endurance of great burdens.

"You can't expect me to take that seriously, Basil. You've mooned too long."

"It is the most serious thing in my life. At your peril, you attack it." Targett's voice, as he uttered his menace, was very thin. He was hopelessly tired.

THE WEAKER VESSEL

"I can't prevent your fantastic infidelities, but I can and will prevent your breaking your word. You repeated the marriage-service of your own free will. I appeal to your honor."

"You and I don't mean the same thing by honor, Evelyn; but I don't break my word. If you're mad enough and wicked enough to ask me to go on ratifying that old promise under the changed conditions of our lives, I suppose I shall do it."

She nodded her head—a quick little nod that disposed of this matter as restlessly and hastily as though it had been a detail of food or drink. Then, flinging out fragrance as she went, she walked with swift, staccato steps to the door. There she turned.

"I'll give up the European jaunt, if you choose. We'll do something together."

He flung his hands up.

"Oh, my God, no!" Then he swallowed hard. "Have you any idea what a bad bargain you've made? Many's the time you'll repent of it, I'm afraid. It isn't going to be gay—this life you've insisted on."

She opened the door, then looked back over her shoulder.

THE WEAKER VESSEL

"I daresay not, but I'll risk it. I *am* a sport, you know, Basil, though you don't think so."

He heard the door shut. When the click of her heels was quite lost in the distance, Targett sat down again at his desk, and leaned across to take the photograph. But this time he did not get from it the thrill that earlier it had so lavishly given. He looked at the escarpments and the towers with dull, imprisoned eyes. The city fell into the category of unvisited and alien places which, since our gaze can never possess them, we look on coldly. It was no more his than his own intolerable home. That was simply one more of the peaks he would never scale. Magic had gone out of it, as the point had gone out of his plot.

She had chosen to take the last advantage of him. He still considered that she had been in every particular grossly unfair; she had served up a perpetual banquet for cynicism. But the fact remained that she had won out. His perceptions—even now he could see quite clearly how brutally he had been tricked—had done him no good. She had only to assert her preposterous rights—rights that he did not believe

THE WEAKER VESSEL

in, even while he yielded—to beat him back from his position. Against whom else in the world would he be incapable of defending his own definition of honor? Honor! He knew what it was, none better; yet Evelyn had only to breathe the word from her meaningless lips for him to vacillate, to succumb, to fail. He had believed in his plot—strategy was so easy! But in the actual, uncivilized encounter she had worked on his nerves like the monotonous iterations of a barbaric drum. He could have faced a flaunting danger, he could have faced even the wearisome hardships of the jungle—he knew it, and Warbeck did not doubt it—but he could not face Evelyn Targett. Even now, after she had gone, he shook as though he needed quinine. It was an Olympian jest of the cruellest.

Appalled by the pattern he saw dimly tracing itself, the deuteragonist bowed his head on his folded hands. They covered, from the touch of his forehead, the galleries and gardens, the signal-towers and palaces, the careless mountains, and the insolent rocks crowned with machicolations as old as time.

